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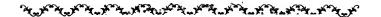
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Sarah Bernhardt



SARAH BERNHARDT

Divine Eccentric

By G. G. GELLER

Translated by E. S. G. POTTER



With thirteen reproductions from photographs

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PART I

Life has taught me that if one is to be somebody, it can only be after death . . .

SARAH BERNHARDT



SARAH BERNHARDT

Divine Eccentric

T

A LITTLE GIRL SAT MOTIONLESS IN the park, alone. A coarsely knitted, mauve scarf protected her from the wind which, from time to time, lifted the yellowing leaves. Her long skirt, fastened with a pin, revealed her slender legs in their thick gray stockings. Her thin, pale face was lit up by big eyes with large, dark pupils, and an untidy mass of red hair framed her proud, delicate head.

The child's eyes, dreamily following the fall of the leaves, had a sapphire brilliancy in the sunshine; but when a cloud passed they became lustreless. The agelong sufferings of a persecuted race, the disquiet of a life of perpetual wandering, could be read in her glances — those glances by which, one day, crowds were to be enchanted, but which were as yet, to the frightened nuns, nothing but manifestations of the Devil. This young Jewess, thirteen years old, had not yet been purified by the waters of baptism. On entering the convent of Grands-Champs, she had only had to abandon the name of Sarah; she was now called Rosine.

This reverie in the quiet convent garden, early in the autumn of 1857, seems like a key-note at the beginning of her life. It heralds an existence of exceptional richness. Rosine Bernard's schoolfellows did not sit dreaming in the garden by themselves. They were destined to anonymity; whereas she ——!

She was so wholly lost in her dreams, whatever they might be, that she did not see a frantic, tousled black mass bounding at her. César, the dog belonging to old Larcher, the convent gardener, was suddenly beside her, standing on his hind legs and panting against her face. César was her friend; she talked to him, stroking his thick, warm fur. But suddenly a new excitement seized the dog; he growled, and showed his teeth. On the dividing wall which separated the convent from the cemetery, his enemy the tabby cat had appeared. He stood at the foot of the wall, barking furiously, while his adversary arched her back and spat at him.

At this the little girl was roused in her turn. Her eyes became more brilliant. Her fists were clenched. She stamped her feet and shouted: "César! César!"

A pointed head-dress appeared round the corner of the walk; it was Sister Marie running towards them, attracted by the uproar. But the little girl, who a moment before had seemed a monument of quietness and meditation, was now engaged in a combat. She would not listen to the Sister's counsels of moderation. The latter, however, was herself lacking in patience; moved by a "holy indignation," she roughly seized the scarf which was wound round the child's neck. At this, Rosine's anger turned against the nun and transformed itself into one of those attacks of raging temper to which she was frequently subject, even from early infancy.

To tame this highly strung nature, the authority and prestige of the Superior were necessary. The child was appeased only by the cool hand laid by Sister Sainte-Sophie upon her burning forehead. Sobbing and exhausted, she was carried away to her bed; and, when the Superior left her bedside, her eyes, once more limpid under their half-closed lids, were fixed trustfully upon the Virgin smiling in the niche opposite her.

Rosine's explosions of anger were provoked by the merest trivialities. Her curly locks had earned her the nickname of the "blonde negress." Perhaps a nun would push back these curls too energetically: Rosine burst into imprecations. A schoolfellow inadvertently stepped on her dress: she attacked the child with her fists. She howled. She scratched. From her nurse she had learnt certain frightful expressions of insult which came back to her in the midst of her convulsions. So the nuns sprinkled her with holy water to exorcise the evil spirit!

Rosine was the daily scandal. For, behind these walls raised against the outer world, youth's games were restricted, its laughter stifled; it was warned and guarded against foolish pranks and shut up in a rigid, pious and monotonous life. And it was painfully difficult for Rosine to conform in her actions and manners to the draconian rule of the convent. In her early upbringing,

both the rites of good behavior and the refinements of speech had been ignored. Her nurse was a good peasant woman, whose sole mission was to nourish healthy children at her robust breasts and to work with her hands. She spoke the language of the people, which, even in France, is not always delicate. Rosine's mother, in her rare interviews with her daughter, did not waste time over details of speech. Her joyous Aunt Rosine laughed at her. Only at Auteuil, in Mme. Fressard's boarding-school, had the little girl's attention at last been drawn to the unseemliness of certain terms.

However, the habits of the stony-faced nuns and the example of her companions combined to repress the impulses of the expansive child more and more.

Those who live beneath the ample conventional robe end by molding themselves in the image of a single soul. The discipline of the imitation of Jesus forms them all in the same fashion. Their recompense is prayer. Their duty is prayer. Their penance is prayer. Three "Paters" in the morning, three in the evening. Six "Credos" on getting up, six at going to bed. The mechanical exercise and repetition of the ritual subdues the most rebellious natures. Thus, after two years, Rosine Bernard showed as much fervor in crossing herself as she had formerly displayed in pulling her companions' hair. In the chapel, during Mass, or in the refectory, when at meal-times the Superior recited the Benedicite, she prayed attentively, thoughtfully and with conviction. Every evening she piously murmured

the prescribed prayers. She prayed, but she also dreamed: when she was grown up, she would be a nun. This idea uplifted her; and she fell asleep offering her soul to Jesus and vowing her body to eternal purity.

And yet despite her uniform and her impulses of piety, pupil No. 32 of the convent of Grands-Champs hardly resembled the docile little creatures who surrounded her. With her crown of untidy tresses, her noisy laughter, her inelegant vocabulary, this mystic child, undisciplined and violent, was not destined to become the bride of Jesus. Only in appearance had she bowed to the ways of the convent.

Years earlier, Rosine's mother had fled her father's home to cast off the yoke of a detested stepmother. This instinct of independence and revolt had been inherited by the daughter, and now it drove her into reaction against discipline. Sometimes her temperament rebelled furiously against the bonds imposed upon it. Rosine was not a favorite pupil. She was often punished, always kept at arm's length. She was the tainted wether of that holy place.

Thus in the event which was about to revolutionize the little world of the convent, no place had been reserved for her. On St. Catherine's Day, in honor of a visit from Monseigneur Sibour, the *pensionnaires* were to give a theatrical performance. In the midst of the general flurry, the young Rosine wandered about with nothing to do. She was on the look-out for the chance to render small services, inspired by the hope of induc-

ing the authorities to grant her a part. But the nuns were inflexible. The little girl was to take no share in *Tobie recouvrant la vue*, the piece written for the occasion by Mother Sainte-Thérèse. She would have been content even to play the dumb Monster; but, alas, the dog César had been chosen to interpret this part!

During the rehearsals, Rosine had no rest. She knew all the rôles by heart, and would recite them in the evenings between two "Paters." She slipped furtively to the side of poor Marie Buguet, who for days had been struggling hopelessly with the part of the Archangel Raphael. Rosine explained to her companion the gestures she must make. She drew quivering accents from her voice. And she was intoxicated with joy when her interlocutor interrupted her with applause.

On the eve of the performance all preparations were complete. The Archangel Raphael alone persisted in remaining dumb and motionless upon the narrow platform. Finally Sister Sainte-Sophie, with death in her soul, faced the fact that never would the Word of the Archangel, Tobias's guide, flutter from the lips of Marie Buguet.

Then, with burning eyes and arms outstretched, the Sarah Bernhardt of the future leapt forward.

"Ma mère! Ma mère! I know the part. Will you let me rehearse it?"

They went through the second act again; and the new Raphael opened his (or her) wings—represented by a very thin pair of arms—inclined his head slightly, and declaimed, with an expression of solemn pride:



SARAH BERNHARDT aged 12

"Fear nothing, Tobias! I will be thy guide, I will clear from thy path the briars and the stones. Weariness overwhelms thee. Rest! I will keep vigil!"

The nuns uttered a sigh of relief and satisfaction. One little girl crossed herself. The pious audience listened open-mouthed to this vibrant declamation.

On the morrow, however, it was the dumb Monster who carried off all the glory of the day. The big black dog gave a masterly rendering of his part. He rolled on the ground with all the necessary humility at the opportune moment, and his four paws waving in the air made all the spectators smile, including Monseigneur Sibour. Rosine Bernard was satisfied; she applauded with all her heart the well-deserved success of her friend César.

The little girl's prowess was all the more astonishing because she had never been a good pupil; she showed what seemed an insurmountable horror of all systematic work. However, with the approach of her baptism, the attraction of the mysterious threw her into ardent religious studies. She plunged into the catechism, eagerly explored the Scriptures, and sat dreaming in her cell, her eyes glowing with mystic visions. Insensibly, the first seven years of her life were fading from her memory. She forgot her Breton nurse, the worthy woman who had trailed her about from Quimper to Neuilly, and from Neuilly to the obscure lodging in the Rue de Provence. Always the same simple, rustic existence, interrupted from time to time by two lovely, fleeting visions: her mother appearing between

two journeys, or her Aunt Rosine between two waltzes—each leaving behind only a cloud of perfume and a rustle of silk. Then the memory of her brief visits, from time to time, to one or other of these elegant women: a confused impression of caresses, toys and sweetmeats.

Rosine Bernard now thought of nothing but the Saviour of Mankind. Already she saw herself in the robe of the novice, separated forever from the outer world. This little daughter of Israel was a passionate believer. In the twilight of her life, the great actress said herself, speaking of this period of her childhood: "Gifted as I was with extreme sensitiveness and a very vivid imagination, the Christian legend won my heart and mind. The Son of God became the object of my worship, and the Mother of the Seven Sorrows my ideal."

The ceremony of baptism, with the incense, the candles, the music, all the impressive mise en scène of the service, thrilled her to the very depths. Kneeling between her two younger sisters, Rosine, then nearly fourteen years old, prayed fervently, and as, at the sacramental sign of the cross, she solemnly abjured the the faith of her ancestors, she made a vow to die beneath the veil.

This mystic resolve was short-lived. Her lofty plans did not, indeed, resist contact with the freedom of nature. A few weeks after the baptism, Mme. Bernard left with her daughter for Cauterets; whereupon Rosine decided, with no less conviction, to become a goat-girl. Her religious enthusiasm, her vocation, only reappeared when the convent walls enclosed her once again.

However, in consequence of a piece of mischief which scandalized the recluses of Grands-Champs and left the girl for weeks hovering between life and death, the enfant terrible shortly afterwards departed for her mother's home, to return no more. Rosine Bernard, now "Sarah" once more, had to initiate herself into a new life: that of her mother and her aunt. Her religious orthodoxy gradually crumbled beneath the erosion of new influences; the worship of God was to hold but little place in her life of movement and vicissitude. But the restless, feverish soul of Sarah aspired eagerly to the sublime. Hence the mysticism of her childhood and the inspired enthusiasm of her life as an artist. And it was perhaps this same need of the infinite and absolute which, sixty years after leaving the convent, when she was ready to die, led her towards a new religious fervor.

~ II ~

At No. 265, THE RUE SAINT-Honoré is no longer a street of shops, dirty and populous. Nor has it yet become the aristocratic faubourg. This portion of the long and venerable Parisian thoroughfare is the intermediate quarter of the comfortable middle class. The proximity of the Palais Royal and the Tuileries confers upon it a cachet of distinction and prosperity.

An elegant, closed carriage stops before the *porte-cochère*. The door, immediately opened, reveals a little woman, still young, with a plump, rosy face and a vivacious manner. She wears white kid gloves with open-work gauntlets. In her left hand she carries a sunshade, with her right she gathers up, with a graceful, practised gesture, the train of her skirt.

This visitor is called Rosine Bernard, like her niece, the little girl who is awaiting her in the boredom of an empty flat in the big house. The mother of the future Sarah has gone out on one of those errands whose significance the child has not yet penetrated. But the aunt arrives and, with her, joy. Hardly has she arrived before the rooms are echoing with happy whispers; then, after the first effusions of affection, there follow interminable confidences.

After the setting of the convent was replaced by that of her home, Sarah's affection concentrated itself almost entirely upon her aunt. In her, in her silvery laugh, in the sweetness of her caresses and in her indulgent temper, she found a refuge. And the aunt responded to the child's love all the more warmly since she knew her to be practically starved of maternal tenderness. For Mme. Bernard treated her eldest daughter with indifference. It seemed as if all her capacity for affection was absorbed by her second girl, Jeanne; Sarah, who was nearly fifteen, and Régina, who was only five, were both neglected. Yet can one blame her too severely?

Julie Bernard interested herself neither in people nor in things. Owing to heart trouble she alternated between moods of deep depression and nervous crises which exhausted her. Wherever she went, an aura of languid disdain for life emanated from her. She was a very beautiful creature with a Grecian profile, a creamy complexion and a luxuriant head of hair. She was very small, but extremely distinguished-looking. When she used her lorgnette, her weary glance was lit with a haughty assurance. Was this gesture, perhaps, inherited from her mother, the Marquise Thieule du Petit-Bois de La Nieuville, who left the château of Saint-Aubin-du-Corbier to share the Berlin flat of the oculist Bernard? Notwithstanding her persistent apathy, she retained the air of a grande dame. She was distant, and her coldness checked any outbursts of affection on the part of her daughters or her friends.

Self-contained in manner, she did not appear attached to anyone. The notoriety, celebrity or outstanding merits of the men who frequented her drawing-room left her entirely indifferent.

At this period, her society was composed principally of two constant visitors. The Baron Larrey was, perhaps, the one for whom she had more liking. The other was a middle-aged man named Régis, whom little Rosine called her godfather. Seldom did Mme. Bernard accept the company of other men, except, one may suppose, in the course of her frequent journeys through Europe. In consequence, the majority of the habitués were recruited from among Aunt Rosine's acquaintances. One of the most assiduous was the Duc de Morny, a handsome man dressed with studied carelessness, who met all things and all men with a charming, disillusioned smile. Later, Sarah spoke of this perfect dandy as a "flirt" of her aunt's. Camille Doucet, director of the Département des Beaux-Arts, was among the faithful, as also a black-wigged Italian, the musician Rossini, who had not worked for the stage for thirty years — that is, since the production of William Tell in 1829. When large receptions were held, other personages were added to these intimates, and several officers, sometimes even a general, adorned the salon with their laced uniforms.

Rosine Bernard, who had not yet reached fifteen, was not admitted to her mother's grand dinners. She was beginning, however, to know the habitual visitors of the house. She played with Baron Larrey, whose

visits, however, were becoming more and more infrequent. Most of all she enjoyed the company of Rossini; the great musician, with a slight accent which delighted her, would tell her fantastic tales to which she lent an attentive ear. On the other hand, she felt a marked antipathy for M. Régis. He, very much struck with her, tried to make her sit on his knee; he would stroke her hair, and appeared interested in the formation of her figure and the gleams in her dark eyes.

The maternal dwelling revealed to the girl a new world which intimidated her. After the bleak years buried in silence, after the cold dream of the convent, she found herself suddenly surrounded by agitation, noise and frivolity. Her childhood had been passed among sexless beings, without passion, whose days and costumes were uniform and their faces set in the same frozen calm. Now she was witness of the restless lives of those about her. She saw men, women, individuals all dissimilar in appearance, in habits, in manners. The contrast was so violent that Sarah, carried away by the whirl of this new existence, felt seized with vertigo. "When I learned that I was not to return to the convent," she wrote later, "it seemed as if I were being thrown into the sea. And I could not swim."

Very fortunately for the child, her Aunt Rosine, watchful and perspicacious, helped her to surmount the crisis which followed this transplanting. She lavished her care, her gaiety, her tenderness upon her niece. But it was the little girl's regret that her aunt could not be with her always; for a large part of the

day she gave place to Mlle. de Brabender, a governess who left the convent in which she lived only to supervise the education and instruction of the young Rosine Bernard. A good creature, this Mlle. de Brabender, in spite of her severity, her hooked nose and her reddish mustache. She seems even to have been quite cultivated. She had enough idea of pedagogy to enable her, for two and a half years, to direct her pupil's studies with success. The latter, incidentally, showed herself studious. Only the piano bored her; she practised with an ill will, at the instance of Rossini, who had an instinctive presentiment as to this young creature, whom he often compared to a symphony.

Mme. Bernard would have been pleased for her daughter to study music at the Conservatoire, thus satisfying at the same time her own passionate fondness for music and her desire to assure her child of a remunerative and reputable livelihood. For the humiliating recollection of her own beginnings was always painful to her memory.

Twenty-two years earlier, at the age of sixteen, Julie Bernard, together with her sister, had fled from her father's house. Life had, indeed, become difficult to endure for them both. The Berlin oculist had introduced a certain Mme. van Berinth into his house, a Dutch Jewess who had entered in the capacity of governess and had not delayed, on the death of the gracious French marquise, a native of Brittany, to reign over the house as its mistress. It was to escape from this stepmother that the young girls fled to Lon-

don. Later, when their father sent after them, they crossed the Channel and settled in France.

The years that followed were marked by many miseries, both material and moral. Julie Bernard was twenty-three years of age when, on October 23rd, 1844, her daughter Sarah was born. Among the entourage of the young woman, one wonders who was responsible; very probably the naval officer named Morel who, later on, appeared again in Paris and at Yokohama.

Rosine married; but she soon left her husband and, still in her sister's company, took once more to a life not free from irregularities. It took no less than fifteen years for the two Bernard sisters to become at last beauties known to the whole of Paris, ladies who offered their hand to be kissed on introduction. Rich in her experience, Julie Bernard therefore proposed to "arm" her daughter for existence. Thus the idea came to her of holding a kind of family council in which the fate of her eldest daughter should be decided.

At the meal which preceded the official deliberations, little Sarah, the person chiefly concerned, was so much intimidated by the gravity of the moment that she forgot to eat. It was necessary for Mlle. de Brabender to recall her discreetly to reality, and herself choose her the best pieces. None of the guests as yet paid any attention to the little girl; only in the drawing-room did she become the focus of attention and the sole subject of conversation. Imagine a tall, lanky girl—the type of whom it is said that they have grown

too rapidly. Interminable arms hung beside the desperately thin body. A pale face, despite its olive complexion—the heritage of her father?—a pronounced nose, eyes set in deep hollows; such at that time was Sarah, who would have been definitely ugly if the attraction which emanated from her whole person, the charm of her aunt allied to the aristocratic bearing of her grandmother, had not, in some mysterious way, compensated for her defects.

Lingering over the appreciation of their coffee and liqueurs, the guests, rendered drowsy by a choice and plentiful meal, began to shake off the comfortable lethargy which had overcome them. There were present, besides the usual friends, a notary of Le Havre—the man of whom Sarah afterwards wrote so bitterly, accusing him of having wasted her paternal inheritance; the husband of another aunt of the girl, the gentle, pious Emile Faure; an odious pontificating bourgeois of the name of Meydieu; and lastly Mme. Guérard, a neighbor, the devoted young wife of an old scholar. This woman, tall, supple and slender, extremely high-minded and delicate in feeling, was later to exercise a great influence over Sarah, who became attached to her with an almost dog-like fidelity.

A delightful passage in Sarah's Mémoires — in general full of omissions, particularly where her private life is concerned — describes this family council exactly.

The murmur of "asides" has ceased. M. Meydieu speaks. "So it's you, my girl, that are disturbing all

these good people, who have really more to do with their time than to bother about the future of a sniveling kid! "he growls.

M. Régis is of opinion that with the hundred thousand francs left by her father to Sarah, the latter, despite her scant attractions and her alarming thinness, will nevertheless be able to make a creditable marriage.

The girl protests vigorously; she is called, she says, by a religious vocation. Her mother listens to each of them, impassive, bending over her embroidery. Insensibly the discussion becomes venomous; opinions clash in an atmosphere of growing animosity. Finally the Duc de Morny, who has followed the debate with his aristocratic air of weary indifference, can stand no more. These little middle-class people bore him to tears, with their family squabbles! He rises to take his leave. Before going, however, profiting by the embarrassment created by his abrupt departure, he carelessly throws out this idea, without conviction, out of pure politeness:

"You know what you ought to do with this child? Send her to the Conservatoire."

Sarah writes later: "This phrase dropped casually, du bout des lèvres, had fallen like a bomb upon my life."

And indeed, these few words were the sole origin of that exceptional glory, the illustrious career of Sarah Bernhardt.

As soon as the duke had left, the discussions recommenced, and in spite of the opposition of M. Régis,

the assembly at last reached an agreement. It was decreed that Rosine-Sarah Bernard should be an actress.

The girl's fifteenth birthday was hardly a fortnight distant. At that age, young girls of the upper classes were already in the habit of visiting theaters; at the least, they attended the classical productions of the Comédie-Française. But Sarah had never been there. The dramatic art, for her, consisted of two meager recollections of her childhood. The first was of the piece acted for the feast of Saint Catherine, in which the little Rosine played a part. The other concerned a visitor who had appeared one day at the convent a shriveled woman, with a gray face and hollow eyes. Rosine's schoolfellows had whispered that it was Rachel. One of them had even put out her tongue at the great tragedienne. No! Sarah did not want to be like that withered old woman; she revolted against these people who, arrogating to themselves the right to dispose of her and her future, assigned to her this mysterious, frightening career of an actress.

However, her mother decided that she should get to know the theater. A few days later, the girl took her place in a box at the Théâtre Français, next to Mlle. de Brabender, who had obtained special permission from the Superior of her convent. The play was Britannicus. Sarah sat motionless, with a beating heart, as if glued to her chair. But the curtain rose again upon Amphitryon, the theme of which was too much for her emotions, and she burst noisily into copious tears. Scandal! In an instant all glasses were

directed upon the box. Mme. Bernard was for sending her daughter home at once, and M. Régis, who was with them as always, grumbled furiously: "Bon Dieu de bois! What an idiot the child is!"

On this occasion, Aunt Rosine was once more Sarah's support. She tried to efface from her niece's mind the unpleasant memory of this first visit. She knew the girl to be proud, with a commanding will, anxious to be the first in everything. Therefore, she flattered her vanity, dazzled her with brilliant visions of theatrical success. Sarah, little by little, felt less aversion towards the lot for which she was destined. Subtle Aunt Rosine! She had all the less difficulty in finding convincing arguments, in that her niece's character was strangely similar to her own.

Then the young girl threw her whole heart passionately into the reading of the works of Corneille, Racine and Molière. She practised reciting La Fontaine's fables, in that slightly remote voice which was to become famous. As a reward for her application, her mother and her entourage now treated her as a grownup person; henceforth she was admitted—always, indeed, accompanied by the inevitable Mlle. de Brabender—to the big dinners given at the house.

One fine morning, Mme. Bernard, on rising from her bed, learned the great news from her daughter—Auber was expecting Sarah the next day at the Conservatoire! When the Duc de Morny heard that he had won his case, he had promised to speak on behalf of his protégée. He had kept his word. It was thanks to

his recommendation that the celebrated musician, who was director of the Conservatoire, consented to see the future Sarah Bernhardt. When the day came, the girl's agitation was intense. What attitude should she adopt before the famous man? To hide her confusion. she absorbed herself in studying the design of the carpet. At this hour in which her destiny was decided. the frightened young creature, with the awkward bearing of a middle-class schoolgirl, was haunted for the last time by her religious vocation, still not entirely dead; she remembered, with a regret mingled with despair, the calm existence of the convent, symbolized by the innocent face of the Virgin. Thus when Auber, with all the affability due to a protégée of the Duc de Morny, asked whether she felt really attracted by the stage, she replied precipitately: "Oh non! Monsieur."



~ III ~

THE NEXT TWO AND A HALF YEARS formed the most tranquil period, and perhaps the happiest, of Sarah Bernhardt's life. This was the time during which she attended the Conservatoire, where Provost, one of the best teachers, supervised her studies.

The young girl, reconciled to the career which had been imposed upon her, showed an exemplary application to her work. Each day Mlle. de Brabender took her to the Rue de Madrid, and was waiting for her when she left. Mme. Bernard parsimoniously doled out to them the few sous needed to cover their omnibus fares and pay for a frugal tea. The aspiring actress, who loved luxury, suffered under her mother's economy. She made no complaint; but every other day she would persuade Mlle. de Brabender to make the journey, long though it was, on foot, so that the next day she might allow herself the luxury of arriving at the Conservatoire in a cab. On those days she caused a sensation at the school — she was the only pupil to arrive in a carriage — and thus aroused petty jealousies among her fellow students; Sarah's casual manner failed to conceal her joy at being envied, at distinguishing herself from her companions even in the smallest details of life.

She had already displayed her originality at the entrance examination. All the candidates had chosen for the test the most dramatic scenes of the repertoire, or poems of a pathetic character. Sarah, with perfect simplicity, recited a fable of La Fontaine: "Les Deux Pigeons." General stupefaction. A smile, first of amazement, then tinged with irony, overspread the faces of the examiners. Auber alone, a handsome old man of seventy-seven, presiding over the board, silently encouraged the candidate. And, little by little, the other members of the board in their turn came under the spell of the charm which emanated from this fragile girl. The high priests of the classical tradition were favorably influenced by the simplicity of her diction, and they pardoned the strangeness of the subject chosen. The candidate at first thought that they had bad-tempered faces; her opinion of them changed when she learned that she had passed.

"Passed!" All the way from the Conservatoire to the maternal home, this magic word awoke in her a long series of hopes, enthusiasms, longings.

"Passed!" Almost before she had entered the flat, she flung the cry breathlessly at her mother.

Mme. Bernard received the happy news with satisfaction, but without any manifestation of exuberance. This practical woman considered her daughter's "career" more than her pleasure. She had not thought it necessary to accompany Sarah to the examination, but had left her to defend herself against "stage-fright" alone. Julie Bernard was convinced that ma-

ternal love expressed itself sufficiently in material care: in providing the child with a comfortable existence, a careful upbringing and education, and in preparing for her, later on, a profession "with a future." If she gave her eldest daughter more attention after her admission to the Conservatoire, she did not display any greater warmth of affection.

Sarah at this time already found a precious companion in Mme. Guérard, officially her mother's friend. This obscure little bourgeoise was a friendly neighbor to the fashionable Parisienne, and did not take too much offense at the slightly patronizing manner which the latter affected towards her. She was not only the unobtrusive guest at gala receptions; she was also, and principally, the friend who would stand by on the "off days," the dark hours when physical and mental lassitude overwhelmed the delicate Mme. Bernard and kept her in bed. Lying limp among her cushions, without make-up, careless of decorum, the famous beauty, the proud descendant of the Breton lords (who ordinarily was taken for thirty at the most, though she was nearing forty) was merely a pitiful creature, worn by fever and despair. But near her, in the semi-darkness of the room, glided a silent and watchful shadow, a sympathetic presence which soothed the sick woman.

It was during these frequent visits that Mme. Guérard became more intimately acquainted with her friend's eldest daughter. She took an interest in the young girl's studies and would talk to her in a familiar strain which touched Sarah profoundly. Mme. Guér-

ard had not the gaiety or the turbulent high spirits of Aunt Rosine. But she was young — under thirty — her smile was kindly, her words gentle; Sarah treated her as a friend and called her "mon petit' dame."

At the Conservatoire, the girl had made friends with several of her fellow pupils, notably the delightful Marie Lloyd and Croizette, who was later to be her keen rival. She was friendly also with Rose Baretta and Marie Colombier. Between classes, these "jeunes filles en fleur" talked frivolities, love-affairs and clothes.

Apart from her classes at the Conservatoire, Sarah went out very little; she still loved solitude, and often would remain for hours in her room doing nothing. The little girl had gradually changed into a woman. In spite of her pale complexion, her skeleton thinness, she was not without a certain melancholy grace, which was emphasized by the veiled intonations of her voice. Sometimes, absent-mindedly she would take up her doll, but only to cast it aside immediately, as if she were ashamed to waste time on such childish games. Then she would sit by the window, motionless, her attention fixed upon the shifting life of the street. Suddenly she would get up and wander about the flat, her eyes gazing in front of her, regardless of the familiar objects. The heterogeneous furniture was disposed in a haphazard fashion. In the Louis XV drawing-room, a Renaissance buffet stood side by side with a Récamier chaise-longue. The dining-room sideboard was adorned with an incongruous collection of Sèvres porcelain and earthenware. The whole flat was an

inextricable muddle, and even its cleanliness left something to be desired.

It is surprising that Sarah, in her Mémoires, claims to have inherited a sense of cleanliness from her mother, whom she describes as of Dutch origin. Apart from the fact that Mme. Bernard was hardly meticulous as to the state of her home, she was in any case not a native of the Netherlands. Her father, the oculist, had only settled down in Holland after marrying his housekeeper - a genuine Dutchwoman - that is, long after Julie and Rosine Bernard had left their father's dwelling, and when Agathe, Vitty and Edouard (the only boy of the family) were already growing up. Sarah perhaps drew her authority for her alleged connection with Holland from the fact that it later fell to her lot to shelter her mother's stepmother, then blind, in her home in Paris. But there can be no question of any Dutch origin for Mme. Julie Bernard. Sarah's entrance-form for the Conservatoire shows that her mother, aged twenty-three years at her daughter's birth, residing at 22 Rue de la Michodière and exercising the profession of modiste, was a native of Berlin. The father's name is not mentioned.

Two years passed, divided between serious studies and a family life in which the principal diversion was the affectionate and volatile Aunt Rosine, who smoked cigarettes — the privilege of society women, at this epoch — and entertained her niece with amusing anecdotes, or gravely discussed her future.

In the spring of 1862, Sarah had just entered her

seventeenth year; it was a significant point in her life. She was on the eve of the final stage. As always, intrigues were afoot. The girl was nervous and worried; she was desperately anxious to win a first prize, whether it were for tragedy or for comedy.

*The great day arrived at last, and Sarah presented her timorous person before the examiners. Her face was swollen, her voice hoarse with tears, her head ached from too protracted maltreatment by the hands of the hairdresser. She felt very ugly with her curls heavy with pomade. And, as might have been foreseen, she obtained no reward. Yet she had trained especially for tragedy! The first prize for comedy, too, was carried off by the charming, graceful Marie Lloyd; Sarah was awarded only the second. At the first shock, the girl was much upset. She lost her temper, and, to avenge her failure, accused her too lovely rival of having achieved by her beauty a success which, in reality, was her just due. Her resentment, however, was soon appeased, especially when Marie Lloyd, pained by her friend's chagrin, asked her to go home with her and stay to lunch.

Mme. Guérard was waiting with impatience for her young friend to come out, and pressed her affectionately in her arms. Mlle. de Brabender smiled as amiably as she could in congratulating her. Yet she knew that her mission was finished, and gave vent to her feelings by a kind of jealous irritation, uttering with unnecessary haste and sharpness the signal for departure:

"Come along, mademoiselle! Mme. Bernard is waiting for us!"

Sarah did not afterwards bear any ill will against the old maid; a few years later, it was with an almost filial piety that she visited her former governess during her last moments, at the convent of the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, into which the old lady had finally retired.

For the moment, Sarah, returning to her mother's dwelling, was consoled for having been only second. Her mother kissed her on the forehead, and this cold, official embrace constituted a recognition of her diploma, and formally closed her irresponsible, careless, adolescent life. Henceforth she was to stand on her own feet, and rely solely on herself.

But our young prize-winner, on the threshold of a career which she knew to be ungrateful, felt sure of herself for the future. She prepared herself for the struggle. With an assurance new in her, she took her place at the family table. The stiff, awkward bearing of a shy little girl was cast aside; she talked with confidence, happy and proud at dominating the conversation. Consciousness of her merit might be read in her smile. She felt herself important, and composed for herself a new attitude suited to the emancipated young woman she was to become. This attitude, in which her will to become "somebody" found expression, was already the first "creation" of an artist, no less than the parts she was later to play upon the stage.

Memorable day, which ushered her into a free and

independent existence! She went out alone now, and whenever the fancy took her. She argued with her aunt as with an equal. More, she addressed her mother in a fashion which did not admit of contradiction. She no longer hesitated to show clearly her persistent aversion for M. Régis. She ignored the presence of old Meydieu; and the other habitués of the house found little more favor in her eyes. She began to understand and to judge men. If an insolent fellow looked her over too complacently, she stiffened. Her severity relaxed, however, for the Duc de Morny, who always bowed ceremoniously before her and kissed her hand; for old Rossini, still charming and still full of vitality; and also for Camille Doucet, the perfect man of the world.

A few days after her examination, Sarah ventured into a literary salon with her friend Marie Colombier. The door of this cénacle opened upon a mixed company: members of the romantic school, mediocre but pontifical, young writers who were to make a name. embittered failures and care-free bohemians. The two girls were received with an affected solemnity, charged with irony. The guests listened to them, questioned them in a confidential and interested manner upon their preferences in literature and their plans for the future, while privately they exchanged mocking glances. Sarah, ill at ease at first, soon recovered her self-possession. These ignorant amateurs could not impose upon her, and when one of them inquired ceremoniously which branch of acting she proposed to adopt, she replied sharply:

"Tragedy, if you have no objection!"

These words were received with ill-concealed laughter. Rachel had been dead barely four years, and the conception of the tragedienne which she had bequeathed to those who had loved and applauded her had nothing in common with the sickly aspect of this girl.

Sarah, no doubt, understood the ridiculous side of her situation. The pitiful impression left in her childhood by the convent visitor had been effaced at the Conservatoire, when she learned of the life and the qualities of the great actress. She knew now the story of this little Jewess, who at the age of ten was begging in the streets of Lyons when Choron discovered her and took her to a school of voice-production. She knew of the vicissitudes of her life, the loss of her voice; her entry into the Conservatoire at the instance of the cashier, Vedel, after many hesitations; her first appearance in 1838; finally the glory of a high talent which commands recognition.

Sarah recalled the life of Rachel, and remembered with respect, with admiration, with confusion, the sad apparition at the convent, the poor creature who, worn out by fatigue after a tour in America, was to die soon after in the gentle climate of Provence. She realized that for the guests of this Parisian salon, and for everyone in France, tragedy had died with Rachel.

Wounded in her pride, taken aback by this first encounter with critical prejudice, Sarah was anxious only to leave this hostile *milieu* as quickly as possible. Poor Sarah! This was but the first skirmish. For how many years yet were the critics to oppose, indefatigably, Rachel's name to her own!

... Sarah is alone now. She has invented some errand as an excuse to leave Marie Colombier. As she crosses the Luxembourg gardens, many, many bitter reflections prey upon her. "Always and everywhere the first." That is the dream. But the reality? At the Conservatoire, she was only the second. At the theater, the competition will be more terrible still, since she will have to fight, not only the talent of the living, but also, and far more redoubtable, the memory of the dead.

Will this discouragement lead her to despair? Perhaps. But infectious laughter rings about her; a band of children surrounds her in a dancing circle. Then the young girl consents to smile. She runs with the crowd of youngsters. Already the cruel laughter of the literary salon is forgotten. She has become again, for a moment, the child wandering care-free about the avenues of a gloomy convent garden, for whom the great Rachel is nothing but a wrinkled and withered old woman.

~ IV ~

It was not long before the stage-door of the Théâtre Français opened to Sarah. Her aunt having asked the Duc de Morny to call on Camille Doucet at the Ministère des Beaux-Arts, the director of the theatrical service, happy to do the Bernard ladies a favor, had an immediate interview with Thierry, the administrator of the Comédie-Française. As a result of this interview, Sarah was sent for shortly afterwards.

What excitement the news provokes! A perfect family council is held to decide on the toilette which the future artist shall wear for her first contact with the theatrical world. Then aunt, mother, sisters proceed, with the aid of Mme. Guérard, to the ceremony of dressing Sarah. They smooth her down, they puff her hair out, each in turn studies her attentively to judge the effect she produces. The person concerned accepts these services with imperial condescension. The prestige of the Théâtre Français has gone to her head a little; and when she steps into the carriage lent by her Aunt Rosine, she sees herself already a famous, acclaimed artist.

Alas, the girl's reception at the sacrosanct offices of the administration was less impressive. The contract offered her by Thierry did not promise her brilliant terms. Such as it was, however, Sarah accepted it, thinking thereby to smooth away the difficulties of making a beginning. And she showed herself regularly at the Comédie-Française, impatient for employment. A vain precaution; it was not until June that she began to rehearse.

Modest though it was, this first contract marked a date in Sarah's life: it meant the beginning of a life of complete independence. She had, indeed, been free from supervision since the departure of Mlle. de Brabender. She employed her time as it suited her; and, with the friendly advice of her aunt, expended the sum allowed her by her mother as she thought fit. Nevertheless, Mme. Bernard deplored her daughter's idleness, and did not fail to make her conscious of it on the slightest pretext.

As these hints succeeded each other, Sarah understood. She was no longer an ignorant child; the rigid upbringing inculcated by Mlle. de Brabender had found its antithesis in the knowledge of life which she had gathered in her mother's own drawing-room. She understood what lay beneath the surface of her surroundings. Chance and circumstance had taught her what intimate ties united the men and women she knew. She looked on life now with a curious eye, and, aided by the influence of the *milieu*, her reflections reached a conclusion which, though rudimentary, sufficed her for the moment: love and a "career," she thought, were the two necessities of existence which must be considered before all else. She contemplated both with equal calm. The desires of the flesh troubled

her the less because few men attracted her; possibly she regarded love more from a practical than from a sentimental angle. In any case, she felt an instinctive repulsion for all the rich bourgeois, middle-aged bankers and elderly Don Juans who, however, offered all the guarantees of "amis sérieux." The "dandy" type, on the other hand, did not displease her. The Comte de Kératry, the ultra-fashionable son of an aristocratic family, belonged to this category. Handsome, wealthy and gallant, he appealed to her taste; and it is this elegant young hussar that one must call to mind in opening the first chapter of the history of Sarah's loves.

It is useless, however, to look for the expression of a romantic sentimentalism in this liaison. Sarah was drawn to this young man partly by the senses, partly by the influence of her surroundings, and perhaps by the attraction of his fortune. From that time on, men succeeded one another in her life. Yet none could ever conquer her completely. Furthermore, the crowd fluttering round her was so numerous that it is difficult to distinguish those who were her lovers from those with whom she was only on terms of friendship.

Who could then foresee the brilliant career of the young woman? At the rehearsals, her fellow actors remained cold and distant towards her. On most occasions she would leave the theater alone, to mingle with the nameless crowd of the Rue Richelieu. Coquelin alone — the Cyrano of to-morrow — showed her some signs of friendliness. There were so many young people there who would never come to anything!

On August 10th, 1862, she faced the public for the first time in Racine's Iphigénie en Aulide. The audience, however, seemed hardly to notice "the début of Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt," though it had been duly announced in the advertisements. (This was the first time that Sarah reenforced her surname with the two consonants which, in her opinion, relieved its banality.) This date was important in the psychological life of the young woman; not, however, in her career. Sarah remained unknown as before. The majority of the critics did not even mention her name. Francisque Sarcey, almost alone, devoted these few lines to her in the Opinion Nationale: "Now we are to see all the prize-winners of the Conservatoire parading, one after another. Mademoiselle Bernhardt (why not simply Bernard?) leads the march. . . . Mademoiselle Bernhardt is a tall, pretty young lady with a slender figure and a very pleasing physiognomy. The upper part of the face, in particular, is remarkably beautiful. She holds herself well and enunciates with perfect clarity. That is all one can say about her for the moment."

Sarcey, then thirty-five years of age, was a journalist with a great reputation, respected for the objectivity of his criticism and the sincerity of his judgments. His opinion carried weight, and many careers depended upon it. He followed that of Sarah Bernhardt very closely, sometimes attacking, generally defending, and never crushing her. The brief note he had consecrated to the young actress was certainly in accordance with the truth. Such, however, was not the opinion of

Mme. Bernard. On scanning the newspapers, the day after the first night, she was indignant at the general silence, and finally called Sarcey a fool. As for Sarah. she, with a clearer knowledge of the realities, was content to grant the exactness of this criticism. She knew that she had not done herself justice. She had been over-excited behind the scenes before the curtain rose, and fainted from exhaustion in her dressing-room as soon as the performance was over. Her constitution was fragile though tenacious, and she had to steel her muscles to overcome the weakness of her body. She was too proud, and also too obstinate, to admit it to herself. M. Régis, who did not understand her disposition, discouraged her systematically: "Why persist in this acting? ... You are so thin, my dear. . . . Your face, though it's quite pretty close to, looks ugly from a distance. . . . Your voice does not carry." As a consolation prize, he advised his god-daughter to try for a rich marriage.

After all, severe though M. Régis may have been, appearances did not belie his words. Sarah's silhouette lacked beauty on account of her extreme slenderness; on the stage, seen from some distance, the defect was all the more conspicuous. Alexandre Dumas the elder, who talked to the young actress for a whole evening, praised the "far-away music" of her voice, but could not help admitting that her figure had the appearance of a broomstick.

Proving her exceptional tenacity, Sarah now displayed an even more feverish zeal in the preparation of her second part. Contrary to the habit she was later to adopt, she rehearsed in front of a glass, studying every detail of her poses, gestures and expressions. Wasted labor. On August 24th, this second rôle brought her no more success than the first. This time, Sarcey's criticism was less indulgent. The celebrated publicist, tilting at the Comédie-Française, expressed his indignation, "not at finding among the beginners such insignificant performers as Mademoiselle Bernhardt — who, most certainly, will never make an actress — but at the fact that, even among the older members of the company, no outstanding talent is to be discovered. The latter," he added, "have no advantage over the newcomers except longer experience."

Sarah swore to avenge herself in Les Femmes savantes, in which she was to play Henriette three weeks later. But in this part, lost in her voluminous white dress, she inspired more pity than interest. Her thin arms floated about in her wide sleeves, whilst from her high collar a bird-like head emerged. The effect was deplorable. Henceforth the administrator-general entrusted only very meager rôles to the protégée of Camille Doucet. Not until March of the following year do we find her again, in the character of Hippolyte in L'Étourdi.

The young woman's ill luck had a still more painful repercussion upon the attitude of her immediate circle. The interest taken in her for a brief moment had progressively relaxed as one failure followed another. At this time, when she had the greatest need of sym-

pathy and affection, she met only apathy, even hostility, in those about her. Her mother, so enthusiastic at the beginning, lost confidence. M. Régis lost no opportunity for sarcasm, reminding everyone that he had been right in the first place, though nobody had listened to him. The Duc de Morny, who felt to some extent responsible in the matter, ceased to show himself. As for the Comte de Kératry, he was traveling, now in Algeria, now in Morocco. Before embarking for the Mexican campaign, he made only brief visits to Paris. In any case, it is unlikely that his presence could afford any consolation to the unhappy artist. Their letters give evidence that their sentiments, which died so soon, had probably never been very passionate.

Sarah suffered profoundly over her lack of success with the public and the indifference shown by her family. She was, indeed, too proud to let her feelings show; she knew how to assume an attitude. But when she was alone, she sometimes gave way to her desperation. One day, she went so far as to undress and stand herself boldly, quite naked, in front of the glass. The mirror offered her a cruelly truthful image of her fleshless body, with its bones jutting out under the skin. She collapsed in a heap, sobbing. At first she pitied herself, then, seized with self-detestation, began to load herself with abuse. In this state Aunt Rosine found her, huddled on the carpet, overpowered by an access of honest rage. Surprised for a moment, then alarmed. she attempted to console her niece; but Sarah, suddenly overcome by shame, slipped from her embrace,

and hastily put on her clothes. Only after drying her tears did she plunge into vehement confidences, mingled with imprecations. Her aunt need not think she was going to kill herself! Possibly, for the moment, the public did not like her. That didn't matter! She would triumph in the end. She knew it. There was so much force, so much ardor, so many longings within her! She would vindicate herself. One day she would know the adulation, the love, of this crowd which was now so severe to her. She would be fêted, glorious. . . .

The merry, fair-haired Rosine was suddenly afraid before this gesticulating fury, whose hair with its reddish lights stood on end like that of a sorceress. She recoiled instinctively, in despair of understanding what demon had possessed itself of this body—the demon of madness or the demon of genius.

It was in May, exactly nine months after her first appearance at the Comédie-Française, that Sarah's resentment against the "Maison de Molière" found a pretext for manifesting itself with such violence that the young woman was obliged to leave the theater immediately.

The Molière memorial festival was in full swing. Faithful to tradition, authors, journalists, celebrities and official personalities were already gathered in the foyer. Sarah arrived in her turn, holding by the hand her young sister Régina, a very lovely child of eight who attracted attention both by her personal prettiness and by the capricious manners she had inherited from her mother. The crowd was spread along the

gallery, and the young actress was strolling among the rest. The corridors were full of a happy murmur of talk when a child's cry rose from among the assembly. Then the pure, remote voice of the young Sarah Bernhardt took on an aggressive note as she cried out: "Méchante bête!" Finally, two masterly smacks completed the wild excitement of the spectators. In spite of the general confusion, everybody soon knew all about the incident. Sarah Bernhardt, the youngest member of the company, had rushed at Mme. Nathalie, the celebrated tragedienne, inveighed against her copiously, and boxed her ears before anyone could intervene. The cause of this scandal was that little Régina, having accidentally stepped on the train of the portly actress, had been pushed away by the latter so violently that she had knocked herself against a pillar.

The situation was delicate. All the journalists had witnessed the scene. They would not fail to exaggerate it, according to the rules of the trade, so as to confer upon it, in their papers, the importance of a minor assassination. This event dates the beginning of the struggle between Sarah Bernhardt and the Press, a struggle carried on for many years with ruthless tenacity on both sides, which caused the great actress for a long time to consider journalists as the most detestable species on earth.

For the moment, everyone bustled eagerly around the swooning Mme. Nathalie, whilst the incorrigible Régina screamed at the top of her voice: "I swear it! The fat cow hit me for nothing!"

Nobody, certainly, had any affection for Mme. Nathalie. Still, who would dare to approve the action of the young *pensionnaire*? Besides, the latter, in spite of the friendly counsels of certain would-be mediators, refused to apologize and to admit herself in the wrong. She cried, on the contrary: "I take the whole responsibility." They let her take it.

In the Bernhardt family the young woman's exploit was little appreciated. Her whole entourage was against her, including this time the ever-indulgent Aunt Rosine. M. Régis restrained himself no longer, and his goddaughter had a painful scene with him. Poor Sarah knew not where to take refuge until the arrival of Mme. Guérard, who comforted her young friend and defended her against the joint attacks of the others.

The next day, the Press was teeming with articles relating the scandalous incident. Among the public, the adventure was treated with amusement or with indignation, but they would remember now this insignificant little artist with the curious voice, whom they had caught a glimpse of one day at the Comédie-Française. These blows were the commencement of Sarah Bernhardt's theatrical career. Thanks to them, the unknown little actress emerged abruptly from her anonymity.

~ V ~

A FEW DAYS LATER, THIERRY SENT for the culprit. He reprimanded her severely and insisted on her presenting her apologies to Mme. Nathalie. But Sarah refused. She declared that she could not submit to this humiliation. She realized that her own interests would suffer; but no matter! When she left the administrator's office, she had not given way.

What, then, was her astonishment (and her joy) when, a little time after, she received a notice to appear for rehearsal in the near future. Sarah let herself be carried away by the most extravagant optimism as easily as by despair, according to the auspices of the moment. She thought that the matter was closed.

In reality, the position was less clear. Naturally, some hesitation was felt at dismissing a protégée of Camille Doucet. But why must Sarah be so intractable? Why did she discourage those well disposed to her, why did she not join in the attempts at conciliation which were undertaken on all sides? Why, the first time she saw Mme. Nathalie again behind the scenes, had she stared at her with that ironical air of provocation, as if to say: "You see, Madame Nathalie... great tragedienne though you are, I have boxed your ears, and I have not left the company."

Unfortunately for Sarah, the fat actress had not been intimidated. Her attitude says much for her influence at the Théâtre Français. The affair was only temporarily suspended; the young actress's triumph was ephemeral, for at the fifth rehearsal her part was withdrawn from her. The young woman's chagrin and anger were all the more intense because she had been certain, this time, of making a success. She rushed to Thierry, and by her violent language and insubordinate attitude provoked a fresh scandal. This time there was no reprieve: her contract was immediately canceled.

This contract, though the material advantages it procured her were but scanty, had represented a kind of guarantee to the young woman, and more especially to her family. Henceforth, Sarah's life at home was painful. Mme. Bernard did not spare her daughter's susceptibilities; she complained that the latter was ruining her future by her detestable character, and selfishly allowing others to bear the consequences of her follies. Sarah, irritated though she was, disdained to reply. She composed her face into an expression of serenity, and posed as "misunderstood." Her friends, modest young girls, were startled at her pride and assurance. Mme. Guérard alone received her with indulgence, subtly perceiving the despair in which her young friend was sunk, beneath her display of arrogance.

There seemed, indeed, no way out of the situation for the unfortunate Sarah. The friends of the family now refused to use their influence to obtain an engagement for her, fearing that she would create yet another regrettable disturbance. Her visits in search of work to the theater managers were badly received. The reply was always the same; only the formula varied. Some lamented: "The theater is passing through a crisis. The public are exacting; they demand big stars in exchange for their money." Others excused themselves: "We don't deny you talent, mademoiselle. But Mme. Nathalie would be very annoyed if she heard . . ."

Sarah understood. From theater to theater she went, growing more and more weary, more and more embittered. She cursed the fate which forced her to reconquer the good graces of her family, to become a little girl again. She resigned herself to it, as a kind of amende honorable; but it humiliated her to the point of self-contempt. She swore — and she kept her word — never again to place herself under this intolerable obligation.

One evening, Mme. Bernard, with burning temples and her body damp with perspiration, lay moaning in her bed. Her heart was racing madly in her breast. She fought for breath. Spasms of pain threw the sick woman into painful convulsions, after which she lay exhausted, with stiffened limbs, motionless as a corpse. The attack had lasted since the morning; and the indefatigable Mme. Guérard had not left her bedside. She tried to calm her by gentle, encouraging words, arranged her pillows, wiped away the sweat which covered the beautiful face, slightly thickened

by age, and distorted from time to time by a spasmodic grimace.

The house was silent. M. Régis was traveling on business in the provinces; the two children, Jeanne and Régina, were peacefully asleep in their room. Sarah had not yet returned from her daily hunt for the problematical engagement. The doctor had just left, after prescribing, without much hope, certain sedatives.

Sarah entered the flat noiselessly, anxious, as she was every evening, not to attract her mother's attention. She had left home very early and did not know of Mme. Bernard's illness. Wearied by a wasted day, she lay down, still dressed, on her bed.

When Mme. Guérard, listening for her in the next room, realized that her friend's daughter was back and went to warn her, she found Sarah lying in a heap, shaken with sobs. But, at the sound of her entry, the young woman was at once on the defensive, aggressive as usual. Only on recognizing her great friend did she relax, and exclaim despairingly:

"Nothing I do is any use! I can't stand any more. I must make an end of it!"

Then Mme. Guérard, usually placid, felt fear lay hold of her. Why did it fall to her to stand between these two tragedies, in the middle of the night, in this silent flat? Here, this pallid young woman with her emaciated body and her burning gaze which revealed an implacable will. On the other side, the mother, torn by the most terrible suffering, doing battle with death.

Suddenly the sound of complaints and painful cries

came from beyond the partition wall. The two women started.

"My mother?"

"Yes. I came to tell you. She is very ill. I have never seen her in such a state."

The young woman let her cloak slip from her sharp-boned shoulders; it fell softly to the floor. She reached the door like one walking in her sleep, wordless, her pale silhouette appearing strangely tall in the semi-darkness. She was no longer tense with the force of a tragic will; she seemed bathed in the softness of a dream. On the threshold of her mother's room she stopped, meeting the feverish atmosphere in which floated a heavy odor of bromide and ether. Mme. Bernard was stretched upon the disordered bed, her arms crossed, her eyes closed, her rich, tawny hair covering the pillow. The flickering gleam of a night-light played upon the waxen face.

"Dead," murmured Sarah, hypnotized by the spectacle.

With one leap she was at her mother's side, bending over her closely, while her lips pressed desperate kisses upon her mother's face. Suddenly, the sick woman roused herself. Tears ran from her eyes. Confused thoughts raced through Sarah's brain; at last she understood. These healing tears announced the end of the crisis. Mme. Bernard was sobbing faintly now; her voice betrayed her emotion as she repeated again and again:

[&]quot;My little Sarah! My big girl!"

Sarah leaned tenderly towards her mother, whose tears were now tears of joy. Embracing each other in an outburst of feeling, the two women forgot the shadow which knelt by them, silently weeping — Mme. Guérard, overcome by emotion and exultation.

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The next morning, about eleven o'clock, the sun was shining in Paris. At the upper end of the Tuileries, at the extremity of the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, the Arc de Triomphe stood, veiled in a rose-colored mist. Sarah Bernhardt and her mother were crossing the imperial park. Both were fresh and smiling; they chattered gaily as they walked, arm in arm. Who would venture to think that this beautiful woman, with her full, handsome figure, was the mother of this all too slender girl with the strange face? And who could know whether to-day they were not walking together for the last time?

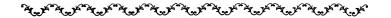
They were going to call upon M. Gerbois, in the hope of obtaining through him an engagement with M. Montigny, manager of the Théâtre du Gymnase. As they were crossing the Seine, a passer-by stopped stupefied at sight of them, hat in hand. It was M. Régis, returned to Paris that same morning. A few days before, he had left the mother and daughter on very bad terms; and now here they were, walking together. He did not understand it. Without leaving him time to solve the enigma, the two women each took his arm, one on either side of him. At this, M. Régis was speech-

less with amazement. Whence came this sudden change of heart on the part of his god-daughter? Jestingly, but in a tone full of emotion, Sarah declared:

"Eh bien, voilà! After nineteen years, we have just found each other again! Now we are great friends."

A happy smile overspread the old man's fat face. He turned towards the young woman and enveloped her in a beam of fatherly benevolence. She, on her side, lavished pretty attentions on him.

So much of joy was amply sufficient to fill the day. The party retraced their steps. To-morrow would be time enough to visit M. Gerbois. Slowly the three crossed the Place de la Concorde, walked along the Rue Royale and plunged into the Rue Saint-Honoré. M. Régis was in great delight. He promised his goddaughter that he himself would speak to M. Gerbois, who would then certainly transmit a request to Montigny. And already all three were sketching out plans for the future. The Gymnase was very fashionable; anyone who succeeded in getting into the company was thereby certain of making a career. Sarah smiled at her mother, at M. Régis, at the passers-by, at the sunshine. The optimism of happier days had once more taken possession of her heart.



~ VI ~

Not without justification DID M. Régis pride himself upon possessing what are known as "influential connections." He was hardly reconciled with his god-daughter before he brought to the house in the Rue Saint-Honoré a letter from Montigny expressing his readiness to engage Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt. It was purely M. Gerbois's friendship with the manager of the Gymnase which provoked this mark of interest, for the young woman had already gained a reputation for her difficult character; and it was only after having read her a lecture next day, that he signed the contract — the second contract in the actress's career.

Sarah's joyous exaltation, alas, was short-lived! She did not take long in realizing that to belong to the Gymnase was not everything. To obtain success it was further necessary to have a part, and that did not depend solely upon the recommendation of a friend. For several weeks the new-comer was employed as an understudy. In this capacity she played Victoria Lafontaine's part, and her début did not constitute an event. Sarah, incidentally, was under no illusions; she had already judged her own acting objectively, and had never yet laid claim to genius. No doubt, she had a high opinion of herself. She was still convinced of

her charm, her distinction and her beauty. But at this Gymnase theater she had no incentive to surpass herself; she understood that she was merely tolerated.

One day, happening to be a little late for a rehearsal, she expected a reprimand — which did not come. This incident gave her to think. She grasped the situation more clearly, and, resolving to try the experiment thoroughly, she intentionally omitted to appear at the following rehearsal. This time, again, she received no remonstrance. In other words, she was treated as a negligible quantity. The theater did not even count on her. How, in these circumstances, could she count upon the theater?

This new disappointment, added to all those of the past, cast Sarah back into that state of doubt in which she had scarcely ever ceased to live since the beginning of her stage career. The outward calm which she showed was merely a mask of dissimulation. She avoided her mother, her sisters and M. Régis; on the other hand, she assiduously sought the company of Mme. Guérard. She would follow her into her kitchen and ask to have the best recipes explained to her. She would spend whole hours in her society in the linenroom, helping her, if necessary, with her sewing and ironing. By this absorption in housewifely tasks, the young actress hoped to forget her worries for a little. Yet her doubts pursued her even into this quiet refuge: and sometimes, overtaken by melancholy, she would talk of her misfortunes and her fears. Mme. Guérard essaved to console her with sympathy and encouragement, and, when the young woman left, her serenity had returned.

She could not much longer ignore the evidence that she was wasting her time at the Gymnase. The management continued to use her as an understudy; there was never any suggestion of giving her a part to create. However, at last she was promised one for April 1864, and she resigned herself to wait once more. Alas! the play in question turned out to be a silly comedy by Raymond Deslandes, *Un Mari qui lance sa femme*, and the part reserved for the ambitious Sarah Bernhardt was that of a little Russian princess, foolish and badly behaved. . . . Three years at the Conservatoire, and this was her miserable achievement!

She rehearsed without ardor or conviction, persuaded beforehand that she would give a bad performance of this mediocre rôle. Nevertheless she affected immense zeal, in the secret hope that her efforts would be appreciated. On April 25th, the date of the first night, her mother was in a box at the theater; Sarah, perceiving her from the stage, had a presentiment of the family complications which her probable failure would certainly call forth. Her acting was artificial, unskilful; it had an air of forced labor. The merest little "super," with some slight preparation, would have acquitted herself better. Sarah had no need to look through the papers next day to discover the general verdict on the play and on herself. Her mother was telling her nothing she did not know when, after

the performance, she kissed her and murmured, in a tone at once vexed and indulgent:

"My poor child, you made a ridiculous Russian princess."

How could she have been other than ridiculous, with her cadaverously thin body, her excessively pale face, her tragically long arms, in the wretched part of a hysterical little courtezan? The greatest optimist would have been discouraged in advance, and Sarah had ceased to be an optimist. She no longer knew those moments of assertive pride, those fits of self-confidence, which, even a little time before, had made her kick against the pricks. The period of her engagement at the Gymnase completed her demoralization. She knew only too well that in this theater she would remain always the poor relation, upon whom unwanted "left-overs" would be thrust. Since this was the case, why persist, without hope, out of mere apathy and cowardice?

Yes, cowardice. Sarah reproached herself for her slackness. Ought she to let herself be humiliated by acting such parts? Why should she not leave the Gymnase in defiance of public opinion, shouting what she thought for everybody to hear? Had she not acted thus once already, at the Comédie-Française? Yes; but to-day she no longer felt the courage to wrestle with difficulties. She was tired, incredibly tired; and she began to be haunted by the idea of death as her means of escape.

Alone in her room, on returning from the first night of *Un Mari qui lance sa femme*, she drew up a mental balance-sheet of her existence since leaving the Conservatoire. Life filled her with as much distaste as the theater. She was weary of her failures upon the stage, her humiliations at home, her disappointments in the sphere of sentiment. For, to the disillusionment of the artist injured in her pride, was added that of the woman wounded in her sensibilities.

The attentions of men? Every theatrical woman possesses her Court of adorers, and Sarah had hers; but she took no pride in the fact. She was forced, indeed, to listen to them sometimes, these admirers who made love to her, and to enact the comedy of love in return. This was the price she must pay for domestic tranquillity. Mme. Bernard tolerated her daughter's theatrical failures, but she would not have tolerated the burden of keeping the girl at her own expense; and Sarah was revolted by this degrading existence.

At five o'clock in the morning she was still sitting on her bed, fully dressed, her eyelids swollen with sleeplessness and tears. The gray dawn filtered through the drawn blinds. The desperate girl's mind was made up now; to die . . . yes, to die . . . or . . . better still —— Abruptly, an idea had come to her. Leaving her room, she traversed the flat on tip-toe, closed the door carefully behind her, and hastily ascended to a higher floor, where she rang the bell of Mme. Guérard's flat. Wrapped in a dressing-gown, her eyes still heavy with sleep, Sarah's great friend was for a moment

struck speechless by this unforeseen early-morning apparition. Then, at once alarmed, she asked: "Your mother?"

"No, it is not about Mother, mon petit' dame; it is about myself that I want to talk to you. I have thought everything over. All this has got to come to an end."

And she told her confidante of all the thoughts which had overwhelmed her during that interminable night. Her youth thrown away, her talent unrecognized (did she still believe in it, one wonders?), her unhappy, misunderstood life, lastly her resolution to finish with it. . . . Startled at this phrase, Mme. Guérard, gentle and tender, repeated the consoling words, the encouragements, which she had so many times lavished upon her. But Sarah continued her confession. This idea of suicide had not been her last thought. With the first glimmer of morning, a more positive mode of reasoning had returned to her. What tempted her in the idea of death was the abandonment of all her present life: the Gymnase, her part, her family, her habits. . . . Well, she would say good-by to all that. She no longer renounced life, but she would leave it all. She would go away, far away, no matter where.

". . . And you will come with me, Mme. Guérard?"

"But really, my dear, it's absurd! And what about your contract?"

Sarah had the bit between her teeth now, and refused to relinquish her project. She would have liked to be far from Paris already. But, by the way, where should she go? . . . Spain! Was it the spring sunshine which inspired her, suddenly, with this choice? Away from the fogs and fatigues of the capital, she would start a new life, among unknown faces. "It was madness," she confessed afterwards, "but nothing could have dissuaded me."

The prudent remonstrances of Mme. Guérard did not convince her; and, seeing this, the excellent lady kindly offered her assistance. Being unable to leave her husband and children, she lent the girl seven hundred francs—Sarah herself possessed nine hundred. Then she went to waken a little dressmaker who lived next door, and asked her to accompany Sarah on the voyage.

A quarter of an hour sufficed for the preparations, and soon a cab carried off the two women, the one sleepy and bewildered, the other excited, highly strung, enthusiastic. Mme. Guérard alone, leaning from her window, followed the departing vehicle with her eyes, and, hardly yet recovered from her surprise, reflected with some embarrassment on the explanations which Mme. Bernard would demand.

This latest piece of eccentricity on the part of Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt meant that the theatrical reporters were not idle next day. The flight of the young actress, the same who had boxed Mme. Nathalie's ears a year ago, was commented on at length and interpreted in various ways. Sarah tells us herself how she announced the news to her manager. "I wrote a stupid letter to Montigny, the manager of the Gymnase, to explain my

departure. This letter explained nothing. It was the work of a child who was certainly not quite right in the head, and indeed I ended my letter with the phrase: 'Have pity on a poor crazy girl!'"

The sentiments which animated Montigny on receiving the missive were probably not those of compassion. The casual methods of this mediocre actress (engaged out of kindness), setting off for Spain on the very day after the *première* of a play in which he, Montigny, had condescended to allot her a part, did not call for indulgence. Yes, she was quite right to say: "Pauvre petite toquée!" Nevertheless, contrary to appearances, this flight was to solve one of Sarah's most important problems. Liberating her from the bonds in which the Gymnase threatened to keep her for a long time, it also, by creating a fresh sensation, forced into the limelight a name which the public refused to remember at the theater.

This journey inaugurated that series of tours about the world which in after years made Sarah Bernhardt "one of the most amazing globe-trotters of the age." The atmosphere of Spanish life was congenial to her. She went from town to town, completely reconciled to life. She attended corridas, the spectacle of which became an absolute passion with her; this earned her, later, the accusation of sadism. On this foreign soil she was fêted, adulated. A multitude of young Spaniards followed her about, ardent, impetuous, impassioned at her strange charm. Sarah made acquaintances easily; she flirted, enjoyed herself. Arriving in the country

without knowing a soul, she left after a little while, the richer by an armful of souvenirs.

It was in the midst of this joyous life that she received, in Madrid, a telegram informing her of the serious indisposition of her mother. The young woman had soon strapped up her trunks, and a few minutes later, doubly saddened by her departure, she left this blessed, welcoming land, its limpid sky, its sunburnt lovers . . . without saying good-by.

~ VII ~

MME. BERNARD'S ILLNESS TURNED out to be less serious than had been believed when it was thought desirable to warn Sarah. By the time the fugitive reappeared at home, her mother was already convalescent.

The joy of the return was, alas, short-lived. A certain constraint rapidly arose between the two women. Mme. Bernard took a severe view of her daughter's eccentricities, and made a habit of remarking that neither running away nor bestowing smacks on the face was advantageous to a theatrical career. After the weeks of total independence which she had just enjoyed, Sarah did not find it easy to endure the indirect criticisms of her mother, still less the acid-sweet observations of her godfather. She decided, therefore, to leave home for good and all; and when, a short time afterwards, she installed herself in a flat in the Rue Duphot, not far from her mother and "mon petit" dame," her first feeling was one of great relief. But freedom, far from solving her problems, involved new difficulties, and by no means slight ones. Sarah lived as she pleased, but not without being harassed by the cares of the present and the future.

The little flat in the Rue Duphot aimed, however, at becoming the scene of brilliant receptions. Already a few distinguished guests were to be met there, but for the most part it was frequented by a crowd of admirers of Sarah's charm, most of whom, fortunately, were extremely rich. For some time the young actress was seen about with a wealthy foreigner, very much in love with her. Then suddenly a young Belgian aristocrat with a famous name entered her life — the Prince de Ligne, who had a European reputation for his distinction and gallantry. Proud of such a brilliant connection, the young woman led a life of sumptuous frivolity. She had not renounced the stage; but her ambition was now to achieve theatrical success through her relations with celebrities and through the reputation which she could win for her name only by mingling with a brilliant circle. To this end she selected her acquaintances with care, accepting only the society of well-known men and the brightest lights of elegant Society. She went out a great deal, frequenting fashionable salons where she commanded attention, both by her extravagant toilettes and by her unexampled personal charm. Everything about her was original: her attitudes, her walk, her slightest gestures, her way of expressing herself. This frail but fascinating creature, with her peculiar beauty, exhaled a breath of the exotic which to some tastes rendered her more irritating than sympathetic; but all men were bewitched by the sense of mystery which emanated from her and could be felt in her presence.

Though she was not appearing at any theater, she may be said to have led a double life. On the one hand,

a brilliant, studied life for her present arena — Society; on the other, a family life, rather simple than otherwise.

It would be an exaggeration to speak of the "luxury" of her dwelling in the Rue Duphot; the place was comfortable, but the lack of taste displayed gave it the banal aspect of the homes of the well-to-do middle classes. Sarah had taken charge of her little sister Régina, the naughty, badly brought-up enfant terrible, whom Mme. Bernard abandoned to her without regrets. Régina, rather than do her lessons, much preferred to take part in the conversation of the grown-ups and pick up the confidences which her big sister and Mme. Guérard let fall in the drawing-room. A sharp child, she acquired a precocious knowledge of the world. When, a few years later, she entered the ballet at the Opéra, the free tone of dressing-room conversation caused her no surprise.

Then for some months Sarah passed most of her time indoors, half-asleep or day-dreaming, buried in a big armchair, while little Régina, huddled at her sister's feet, watched her face. Sitting motionless for hours at a time, Sarah gazed at a drawing on the wall, her eyes veiled by a mist of imagination. A strange smile played from time to time upon her lips. A new torpor overcame her, whilst unknown sensations trembled within her. Another life was now throbbing in her flesh. Her fragile body endured the heavy burden with joy; in company with "mon petit' dame" she busied herself over minute white objects which she caressed and

contemplated lovingly. She had almost forgotten the stage; her whole being was transformed.

At last the long-desired day arrived, and on December 22nd, 1864, all her artistic ambitions, all her dreams of fame, were eclipsed by a pink, quivering little mass of flesh which, at that moment, represented her whole joy and her whole future.

"Ah! She was already a true woman!" Alphonse Daudet afterwards exclaimed. And, indeed, the slender, youthful Sarah Bernhardt, so slight that she was taken for a very young girl, now felt her being to be truly complete.

But life did not pause, and its exigencies would not allow the young mother to remain absorbed in contemplation of her baby. On the contrary, reality reminded her that she must in future face adversity with all the more courage, since she had henceforth to fight for another besides herself. Sarah began, then, to appear in Society once more. She revived her old association with influential people. She expended all her energy in visiting and making more acquaintances. Her happiness as a young mother was tinged sometimes with melancholy. The Prince de Ligne had not been with her when the child was born! But Sarah was energetic enough not to waste time on ruminating over the past. Neither the rosy face of her son nor the image of the prince could now deflect her from the career which called to her irresistibly.

At twenty-one she was not lacking in optimism, nor, above all, in tenacity. Shortly after the birth of

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her child she had succeeded in obtaining a part at the Porte Saint-Martin Theatre, in a piece called La Biche au bois. True, it was again only a matter of understudying, and she did not greatly distinguish herself in the part. But Lambert-Thiboust had promised that she should play the heroine in a play of his which was to be presented shortly at the Ambigu. By misfortune, the dramatic author came up against the ill will of Chilly, formerly the manager, now the lessee, of the theater, who proposed to put in one of his protégées. The author, who favored Sarah, could only bow before the managerial decision. Furthermore, Chilly declared brutally: "Lambert-Thiboust is mad! No one ever saw a shepherdess as thin as that!"

Sarah was indignant at this piece of offensiveness: she went away with a heavy heart and sought out Camille Doucet. The charming, affable old man had never ceased to take an interest in her fate. He was still friendly with her Aunt Rosine, who told him of her niece's various adventures. He had heard of the birth of the child, and knew that the mother was in some financial difficulties. So he received Sarah with an indulgent and fatherly smile. He reminded her of the scandals of the past, but only to laugh at them. He would try to help the young woman, he promised; and at this she withdrew, moved to tears by his kindness.

And, indeed, it so happened that the Odéon, undergoing a change of management, had to renew its company. A few young performers were needed. Camille Doucet immediately put up Sarah as a candidate: he

gave his word of honor that she would be a model of sweet docility. Meanwhile, Sarah at home was going through her repertoire of Racine, before her sister Régina and Mme. Guérard, to the great joy of the infant kicking in its cradle. The actress's voice rose, remote yet full of warmth. Her diction was simple and penetrating, her words curiously disturbing, like the emanations of opium. Regina and "mon petit' dame" listened admiringly, while the baby went to sleep. . . .

Two men, very different from each other, were then presiding over the destinies of the Odéon. The first was Duquesnel—young, enthusiastic and susceptible. Sarah had an interview with him which went off perfectly. He was captivated by the charm of the actress, whilst the latter, at the words of this amiable directeur, felt great hopes arising within her.

The second manager of the theater was the famous Chilly, of evil memory, as far as Sarah was concerned. He was an ill-mannered creature with a solidly established reputation for miserliness. It was the custom to say that there was "no sentiment about him." Talent alone received from him some civility and consideration — for talent brings in money. The consent of this boor was indispensable to her engagement.

When the time came for signing the contract, Chilly at first pretended not to recognize Sarah. Without raising his eyes from his desk, he brusquely held out the precious paper to the young woman. In a moment of painful hesitation, Sarah wondered whether to protest at the ridiculous clauses which offered a month's trial engagement with a hundred francs as sole emoluments. But did she not wish to enter the Odéon at any cost? She resigned herself, then, and accepted. She accepted even the growl which Chilly addressed her by way of thanks.

"You know, it's Duquesnel who is responsible for you, for I wouldn't have engaged you for anything on earth."

At this new insult, indeed, she flushed, and came near to boxing the insolent fellow's ears. But she had not forgotten her promise to the kind and amiable Camille Doucet, and contented herself with retorting disdainfully:

"Ma foi, monsieur, if you were sole manager, I wouldn't have signed!"

At the beginning of August 1866, Sarah joined the company at the Odéon; and on the 15th, the Emperor's birthday, she made her first appearance there in the course of a free performance offered to the Parisians in honor of the occasion. She played Aricie in Phèdre, and replaced Dicat Petit in Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard. The insignificance of the former part hardly allowed her to attract the attention of the public, but why, in the second rôle, had she adorned her white silk skirt with red and blue rosettes? It was a bad beginning. Duquesnel, alarmed both in his sympathy for the débutante and in his sense of responsibility, took refuge in a box; but he was mistaken if he thought to avoid the sarcasm of Chilly. The latter found him in the end, and let himself go thoroughly: this actress

would never be any good; she had neither voice nor diction; and why this fantastic costume covered with tricolor cockades, which made the spectators burst out laughing in the auditorium and ask aloud whether she was going to sing the *Marseillaise!* Duquesnel could make no reply to his colleague's exasperation. Instead, he slipped away, to rejoin his protégée in the wings and urge her not to give way to discouragement.

The term of the trial engagement expired, however, and Duquesnel, anxious to grant a renewal, had to face his redoubtable colleague.

"It's on the first of September that Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt's contract expires, I believe?"

"Yes."

"I propose that it should be renewed."

Chilly leapt in his chair:

"Ridiculous! The girl isn't worth a hundred francs! She's too thin! It will make her ridiculous in any part!"

Duquesnel restrained him and vehemently pleaded once more for his protégée. But his partner remained inflexible. Finally the young manager fired his last shot, point blank:

"Perhaps, as you say, she is not worth a hundred francs. But, apart from that question, you have no objection to her presence, I hope?"

And as the other stared bewildered, not understanding what this was leading up to, he went on:

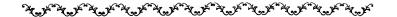
"Will you kindly deduct a hundred francs from

my salary and put it to the account of Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt?"

Chilly, at this proposition, shrugged his shoulders and left it at that. As far as he was concerned, this fool Duquesnel could manage his affairs as he pleased!

Sarah, who knew nothing of this transaction, wondered by what miracle she stayed on at the Odéon. In gratitude to the unknown power which protected her, she made a vow to accept any parts they might care to entrust to her. She even experienced a certain joy in thus ingloriously hanging on to the last remaining chance of revealing her true quality.

It was by reason of this vow that, in September 1866, Sarah Bernhardt made her real début on the stage.



~ VIII ~

In the Luxembourg gardens, breathless children are scampering around the pond. Students wander in laughing groups down the big walks. But along the path that winds about the Fontaine Médicis — a more secret spot, the haunt of lovers and dreamers — two silent women, arm in arm, are walking with slow steps.

The older is dressed in a long, ample cloak, and leans upon a black stick. In her face, hollowed into deep wrinkles by a tumultuous existence, two large, thoughtful eyes shine gently. Her nose is hooked, and her mouth coarse-looking and somewhat vulgar, but these imperfections are effaced by the infinite kindliness which radiates from her smile. Her companion is her junior by at least forty years. Were it not for the lack of resemblance between the two strollers, one would take them for mother and daughter. They have, however, nothing in common, save the celebrity of their names; but the one is hardly at the dawn of glory, whilst the other has reached her decline. The name of the elder woman is George Sand, and, nine years later, Victor Hugo will say, over her tomb: "I weep a mortal woman, and salute an immortal name." The younger, Sarah Bernhardt, is as yet merely a

little actress, but her name is beginning to glow with promise.

The two women met in the wings at the Odéon during a rehearsal of François le Champi, and developed an immediate affection for one another. The author loved the far-away voice of the actress, whom she called her "little Madonna," and whose fragile form seemed to her the feminine ideal of an age to come. Sarah, for her part, offered George Sand a quasiromantic tenderness. She loved, in her, the heroine of several wonderful romances. When she considered the kind, rather faded face, she thought instinctively of Chopin, of de Musset — the musician and the poet. At the back of her memory whispered the laments of the "Nuits," the despairing harmonies of the "Nocturnes." At times she felt almost a jealousy of the woman who had been so much loved. But this momentary resentment on the part of the little actress, disappointed by the banality of her own sentimental adventures, quickly gave place to admiration for her who had inspired so many masterpieces. It was with a gesture full of deference that she took the old woman's arm.

Sarah was still playing only unimportant parts. She herself was astonished, sometimes, at her patience. It is true that she had to remind herself very frequently of her promise to Camille Doucet, in order not to abandon herself to the anger which rose within her. She succeeded, then, in practising at the theater the

same docility and submissiveness of which she had given evidence in former days at the convent.

Further, this perseverance was beginning to bear fruit. Sarah did not pass entirely unnoticed. She had found her devotees, the students of the Quartier Latin, who greeted her entrance with vigorous and determined applause. The irascible Chilly, after persisting for a long time in employing her only as an understudy, at last made up his mind to allot parts to her. In Athalie, François le Champi, Les Femmes savantes, Britannicus, she carried off small triumphs. In Ianuary of the following year she was given the part of Hortense in Le Testament de César Girodot. Her interpretation of it earned her a eulogy from Sarcey: "Mademoiselle Bernhardt astonished me in the rôle of Hortense. Several times I found myself admiring, in this practically unknown girl, a singular exactness of intonation, an unstudied elegance, and a sense of the stage which is really remarkable. The strange thing is that she does not appear to be aware of her gifts. She acts in a casual manner, as if bored by her work. She is entirely without ostentation, and abandons her charms to the grace of God. What a pity that this young woman has not yet consented to take either life or her art seriously! She has the makings of an actress, if she would."

Together, the two managers of the Odéon read this appreciation by the most celebrated theatrical critic of the day. Satisfaction at being proved right against the judgment of his colleague—and perhaps against his

own judgment — showed clearly on Duquesnel's face. But Chilly was in no hurry to recognize his mistake; no, indeed, the last word had not been said yet. He muttered: "We will talk about this again later. For the moment I must go and watch the rehearsal."

Duquesnel enjoyed the embarrassment of his associate. It was certain now that his protégée's success would increase steadily, and he patiently awaited his victory in the secret combat which he had been carrying on for several months. He attached great importance to this victory, knowing how much his failure would have been exploited by the troublesome Chilly.

The following month the Odéon revived Kean, by Alexandre Dumas the elder. The first night promised to be tempestuous. Political passions were mingled with artistic considerations. People were beginning to weary of the reign of Napoléon-le-Petit. The public, roused against the author of Monte Cristo in consequence of an adventure which had nothing to do with the dramatic art, acclaimed the name of his great exiled rival. All the audience were on their feet, howling at the top of their voices: "Ruy Blas! Ruy Blas! Victor Hugo! Victor Hugo!" Dumas, wrung by anger and despair, gesticulated in his box and shook his fist at the audience. Facing a volley of hoots and whistles, he attempted to speak, to explain, but the uproar became louder as he did so and his cries were lost in the tumult.

Chilly and Duquesnel, meanwhile, ran from one end of the theater to the other in a flurry, with no clear idea of how to cope with the situation. Finally there seemed no alternative but to ring up the curtain and begin.

The curtain rose before the howling mob, and, in the midst of this human tempest, Sarah made her entry, pale with nervous exhaustion, her hands icy, almost fainting. As usual she was oddly dressed, and her eccentric costume excited more noisy laughter than ever among the assembly. But the faithful liegemen of the young actress, the students, were at their posts, and their vigorous applause soon silenced the aggressive laughter. Little by little silence was established in the theater, and it was during a lull that Sarah, who had recovered some of her composure, began her confession of love. Instinctively, the most agitated fell silent. captured by the magic of this voice in which infinite enchantment succeeded infinite distress. The young woman ended her long speech amid a spellbound calm. The public did not even applaud; they were subdued by this warm voice, as the wild beasts were tamed by the song of Orpheus.

In the course of this eventful performance a somewhat sheepish Chilly made his way to Duquesnel's office, assumed a hurried manner and said, with an attempt at airiness: "Well, I was wrong. Everyone is wrong sometimes. That child is clever. She can always take Jane Essler's parts. It's a pity, really, that she's so thin! Anyway, suppose we give her two hundred and fifty francs a month! And you — you must go to the cashier and take back the sum you advanced."

Then, with the air of one who has just concluded a good business deal, the cunning old man left the office, rubbing his hands.

Next day the Paris newspapers acknowledged the triumph of Sarah Bernhardt with the most favorable comments. Sarcey conferred his eulogies upon her for the "most moving way" in which she had spoken "one of those interminable speeches of which old Dumas is all too fond."

From the date of this creation onwards, the young actress felt herself to be on the right path. She studied her parts with great application; and the results of her zeal were satisfying. Two months after Kean, she played Cordelia in King Lear, which won her a fresh success. Gratification at the victory she had gained, both over herself and the public, gave her back her old gaiety. Less and less subject to her fits of temper, she had developed the habit of observing herself more closely, of controlling her gestures and words, and, without entirely reforming her always volcanic character, she had at least softened its asperities.

Since leaving her mother's home, Sarah had been studying in the hard school of life. The two hundred and fifty francs allotted her by Chilly were preposterous. She was obliged to keep up a certain style, and she was accustomed to luxury; she was forced, therefore, to have recourse to the usual perquisites of young actresses. She no longer doubted of her future, and she was anxious to neglect nothing that might facilitate the success of her career.

She had changed her little flat in the Rue Duphot for another, more spacious, in the Rue Auber. Writers, journalists, important Court personages had been led to visit her by her success; and she meant to receive them worthily.

In the midst of these distinguished men, the young woman moved, crowned with a halo of mystery. The theater was beginning to influence her manner. In her salon, she was fond of striking sensational attitudes, as if to draw nearer in private life to the heroines she incarnated. On the stage, on the other hand, her long familiarity with the footlights steadily increased the naturalness of her acting and the ease of her movements. Only rarely now did she experience the stage fright which in the past had given such a mechanical stiffness to her gestures and false intonations to her words. She was no longer ashamed of her thin figure, to which she had become accustomed, as the public had also. She knew that she possessed a special captivating charm, an attraction peculiar to herself which was in happy accordance with her frail build.

Conscious of her originality, her distinction, her talent, accustomed henceforth to her little successes, she gradually forgot her difficult beginnings, the struggles waged to obtain parts, the humiliations she had suffered, the sacrifices she had consented to. The enthusiasm of the students of the Quartier now afforded her little more than the banal satisfaction of eulogies taken for granted. At times she was tempted to murmur against the monotony of these easy tri-

umphs. She aimed at far higher things. She went as far as to neglect certain rôles which she judged unworthy of her. Sarcey, who decidedly took an interest in the young actress's career, uttered a friendly reproach on this subject. "Mademoiselle Bernhardt is delightful, but why does she not learn to speak verse, to vary her inflections, to enrich her performance? If she will work, she has a fine future before her," he wrote apropos of Sarah's acting in *Le Legs*, in May 1867.

There was nothing unkind in this criticism. The Press published others which were less indulgent to the young member of the Odéon. Their frequent acerbities did not fail to dispose Sarah strongly against their authors. She did not easily endure that anyone should set out to give her advice. No matter whether other people were right or not! She needed no lessons and would not tolerate them. The proud, haughty little girl lived again, sometimes, in the actress; and Sarah flew into a violent temper with anybody who had the presumption to judge her, or the impertinence not to award her the first prize.

At these moments the artist, raging and self-willed, swore to conquer. As in the past, she steeled her muscles, prepared herself for further struggles, and fed upon burning hopes and visions. But she knew also how to wait; and therein lay her strength.

~ IX ~

A TALL, BEAUTIFUL, DARK WOMAN, closely wrapped in furs, burst like a gust of wind into the managerial office of the Odéon. Duquesnel, lost in a cloud of smoke, was about to dismiss the intruder. But he smiled affably on recognizing the tragedienne Agar.

The celebrated interpreter of the great classical works, who was called "the Queen of the Odéon," was some ten years senior to Sarah. At this time, late in 1868, she was at the apex of her fame, and her preferences were practically law in the second French Theater.

The actress laid before the young manager the traditional manuscript, regarded with such misgiving by all who have to direct the destinies of a theater.

"A manuscript?"

"Yes, read it, Duquesnel, it's a masterpiece. Really, don't look at me like that. It's not a classical tragedy in five acts. It is admirably written. We must play it at once."

"Very well," Duquesnel acquiesced politely. "I will read it. You may rely on me."

But this was not Agar's idea. She protested, authoritatively: "Read it at once, I beg of you. It is the work of a young official at the Ministère de la Guerre. In a

month's time we shall have to give a benefit performance. This little piece has come along most luckily. It is very simple to put on: two characters; simple scenery and costumes. All I shall need is a bench to sit on. I shall be Sylvia, the courtezan of Florence, with a very low dress, leaving my neck, shoulders and bosom bare. The second character is a lad of seventeen, a poet who will speak with his lute in his hand. I thought of little Sarah for this part. In appearance she will make a perfect boy. She has the deep eyes and musical voice needed for this 'passer-by' in search of an ideal. You will see, Duquesnel—it will be a success."

Agar was tenacious of her project. Her enthusiasm had supported her. She had spoken warmly. Obediently, half convinced, Duquesnel took up the manuscript and began to read, whilst opposite him Agar watched his face for signs of the emotion she herself had felt on reading the play.

"You are right, Agar," exclaimed Duquesnel at last. "It is a fine work. We will play it in January. You have my word. I will settle with Chilly."

The same evening, in her dressing-room, Sarah received a visit from Agar, followed by a slim, pale young man, with ruffled hair like that of General Buonaparte, to whom, indeed, he bore a strange resemblance. This was the poet François Coppée, on whom the tragedienne cast a tender glance as she explained to her friend the object of her visit.

Although she had not yet read the piece, Sarah, won by the sympathy which the writer inspired and by the enthusiasm of her illustrious elder, accepted the part of Zanetto.

And so, shortly, amid the general bustle of the theater, they began to rehearse *Le Passant*. The atmosphere of the Odéon was cordial, and the frankest *camaraderie* was the prevailing custom. The artists loved their profession and devoted themselves to it zealously, but the coldness, the perpetual affectation, which were "good form " at the Comédie-Française, would have been out of place here.

The author of *Le Passant* felt immediately at ease in this sympathetic *milieu*. His unassuming manners, the intelligence of his conversation and his occasional mordant wit made him liked at once. He was the more appreciated since the artists were accustomed to ill-humored and pontifical authors.

On January 14th the first performance of *Le Passant* had a triumphal reception. Sarah had never yet seen anything like the enthusiasm which shook the auditorium. They clapped, they cheered, they shouted for the two performers, who were the object of especial ovations.

This date, January 14th, 1869, marks the first steps of two fine talents, two great names, towards the highest fame — François Coppée, the poet, and Sarah Bernhardt, the actress.

After this successful performance was over, the Odéon was the scene of a joyous exuberance which was not customary there. The two queens of the day, Agar

and Sarah, had difficulty in escaping from the enthusiasm they had aroused. Their dressing-rooms were filled with bouquets, and enthusiastic admirers crowded at the doors. Duquesnel, however, was more satisfied than anybody. His joy burst forth irrepressibly. The only regret of the young manager was that his colleague and keen adversary, Chilly, was not there to witness what he called "his victory." Alas! Sarah's old antagonist was at this moment watching over the body of his son, who had just died at the age of twenty. While thus overwhelmed with sorrow, it was with indifference that the little man, who was not such a bad fellow after all, learned from a telegram of the exceptional hit made by the actress he had so long misjudged.

The success of Le Passant carried it to its 150th performance. Sarah's name, famous henceforth, remained linked with this memorable and remunerative play. Eulogistic articles abounded in the Press. Her triumph contributed not a little to the enrichment of the actress's salon by the most outstanding personages of the time. This salon was soon regarded as one of the most sought-after social centers of Paris and its vogue continued to increase steadily. The wit, the apt repartee, the charm of the hostess, were praised no less than the talent of the artist.

Thus, in the prime of her youth, Sarah Bernhardt already played at being the Princesse Lointaine. Everywhere, at the theater and at home, she was fêted, surrounded, praised, adored. Even her eccentricities were imitated. But all success has another side to it; and, as the number of her admirers grew, that of her enemies grew equally.

Sarah had little taste for journalists; they had been hard on her débuts, and pitiless towards her first successes. Some of them bore her a grudge for the way in which, once known, she had indulged her dislike of them. Other adversaries arose amongst Society women, whom she had allowed herself to treat with a certain hauteur, and also amongst her rejected lovers. The troop of failures, who could not forgive her for having succeeded, came to swell the ranks. Consequently, wild stories were carried about, whispered in corners; and by persistent reiteration these tales, immensely amplified, finally took on an appearance of reality.

All the men who visited Sarah Bernhardt more or less frequently were assumed to be her lovers. The most improbable adventures were attributed to her. When she played in *Le Passant* at the Tuileries, a rumor was set afoot that she had a liaison with the blue-eyed Emperor, whom, indeed, she found very likable. The vindictive hatred of some, the jealousy of others, the unwholesome curiosity of a public always eager for back-stairs gossip, pursued Sarah everywhere. Where spite did not suffice, calumny was added. The vilest actions were attributed to the actress. When her flat was burnt, she was at once accused of having perpetrated the fire herself, to obtain the insurance money. She was accused of having discovered an original form of publicity because, on the day after the accident, a few

papers, sympathetic to the young actress, related at length her courage in rescuing her child and Mme. van Berinth, her step-grandmother, from the flames.

Sarah despised these infamies; they even gratified her, for she saw in them the inevitable price of her dawning glory. She was now really convinced that a great future was in store for her, without having yet clearly perceived what the basis of her fame was to be.

And yet, superficially, what a fantastic creature she remained! Disconcerting, bizarre, contradictory, changeable. Sometimes she was proud, cold, haughty, glacial in manner. Then suddenly, she would become sensuous, intoxicating men by her sinuous movements. Or else, for no reason, she would burst into laughter, and create the most jovial atmosphere around her. On some days, again, she adopted a modest, dreamy, sentimental air. Her voice became languorous and gentle, her gestures weary and caressing; and, in the full white dress which she habitually wore, she seemed innocent and timid.

On the stage, Sarah Bernhardt was before all things the idol of the young. The nature of her talent fitted her to interpret the artistic aspirations of a new generation. She realized this, accustomed now to the enthusiastic applause provoked by her mere appearance on the boards of a theater, and to the admiring curiosity which her name had begun to inspire.

Like all stars, she now possessed a public, her public, continually enlarged, and the post every day brought her the artless homage, the poems, the expressions of tenderness, the timid avowals, which follow in the train of fame.

She played in *Le Bâtard*, making a great success, and Sarcey once more called the attention of the public to her with these panegyric lines:

"Mademoiselle Bernhardt does not seem to me at all pretty: she has something much better — charm; and it is impossible to see her without being moved. With what blushing, confused grace she covered her face with her hands when she found herself face to face with her lover's mother! With what a passionate movement of modesty she threw herself at the elder woman's feet, stifling her sobs in the folds of her dress!"

But the time was long past when such a eulogy would have overwhelmed her with joy. Now she would wish that new epithets should be discovered or invented to praise her. Persuaded that she offered the public something without precedent, she demanded in return that they should grant her talent a privileged place. It must be admitted that she was conscientious, and lavished her efforts to merit the exceptional position to which she aspired.

She appeared successively in L'Affranchie and in L'Autre, a new piece by George Sand. Her existence was divided between the study of her parts, the search for dramatic effects, and her social preoccupations. After the burning of the flat in the Rue Auber, she installed herself sumptuously in the Rue de Rome, and transported there her manner of life — smooth, for-

tunate, brimming with all she could desire. Or so it seemed. . . .

For if she was delivered from material cares, her restless spirit, careless of luxury and triumphs, was now hastening in pursuit of the chimera called Happiness, the synthesis of all the desires and all the aspirations of men.

~ X ~

On July 19th, 1870, the stormladen atmosphere which lay heavy over Europe was brutally shattered by the roll of drums.

The capitals were in a fever. In Paris, the boulevards were swarming with excited men and women, uttering shouts, waving flags, roaring fragments of the Marseillaise. In Berlin, unter den Linden, tumultuous groups made themselves hoarse with shouting: "Nach Paris!" On both sides of the Rhine the war intoxication was the same, the inhabitants equally assured of victory. The first trains set out to the sound of fanfares, followed on each side by the same enthusiasm.

Meanwhile, at the frontier, already the forest of Thionville was in flames, the first sacrifice to the Moloch of war. And soon the soil of France was strewn with the victims of both sides, every day more numerous, whilst the high spirits which had prevailed at the beginning of the war grew ever more artificial and were mingled with the tears of the bereaved families. It was the traditional mournful tragedy: exaltation was succeeded by the sinister monotony of miserable scenes, with their threefold ornament of mud, blood and tears.

On July 28th, Napoleon in person took over the command of the French army. On the 31st, William I

replied by taking that of the Prussian army. Already the first skirmishes were reported: Wissembourg, Froechwiller. Every day, in brief but eloquent lines, the official communiqués vouchsafed the most contradictory information. Alarming rumors were circulating, always "on good authority." What was true? What was false? It was impossible to discern. The French nation began to murmur and to doubt whether the sacrifice was worth while. Warned by some intuition, the people felt a presentiment of disaster.

In any case, the Government could no longer conceal the débâcle. The Prussians had just broken the French front. The retreat began, followed by the invasion, with all that the word implies. Each day, abandoning the invaded villages and the wounded, those who were called the "refugees" fled, in pitiable hordes, towards the capital. Men died. Women wept, even those who had received no direct blow from the cataclysm.

Among these latter was Sarah Bernhardt. At Eaux-Bonnes, where she had been undergoing a cure since the commencement of hostilities, she waited impatiently for the posting-up of the official communiqué, the daily reading of which filled her alternately with optimism and despair. Highly strung and delicate, excessively impressionable, she was haunted by an obscure sense of misfortune. Events, alas, were to justify her! Hardly a month had passed since the first cannon-shot before the remnants of MacMahon's army were

annihilated. At last, the horror-stricken population received the terrible news: SEDAN.

Sedan! The surrender; the Emperor's capitulation; then, on September 19th, 160,000 Prussians at the gates of Paris.

Before the state of siege was proclaimed, Sarah Bernhardt had returned to Paris with her child. She went straight to her mother, whom she induced to leave for Le Havre with the little boy.

During the weeks which followed, the actress suffered acutely. Her solitude, and particularly her separation from her child, whom she adored and had never left, contributed to her unhappiness. Unoccupied, she wandered at a loose end amid the general frenzy, a prey to the most contrary sentiments. For she changed her opinions easily, defending with obstinate violence to-day what she had combated yesterday. Thus, during the feverish weeks which had preceded the outbreak of hostilities, whilst some were intoxicating themselves with bellicose enthusiasm, and others were anxiously scrutinizing the political horizon, Sarah Bernhardt, in her salon, in the course of her most brilliant receptions, had vehemently condemned all thought of war. Revolted in her feelings of humanity and in her maternal heart, she did not hesitate to maintain that war was an infamy, which protected, excused and glorified shameful crimes. Her sincerity did not fail to create certain difficulties among her entourage, and even led to a breach with a general of her acquaintance. Then, at the time of the mobilization, the young actress had expended an equal emotion and exaltation in wishing for the defeat of the Prussian armies; and every time the French army suffered a check she felt wounded in her national pride, even abandoning herself to fits of rage, as she had done in former days — a spoilt, capricious "juvenile lead" — after her failures on the stage.

After having so violently damned the crime of war, Sarah now went so far as to refuse pity to the dead unless they wore the French uniform. Nevertheless, human carnage always remained repugnant to the great actress, who, remembering these sorrowful experiences, exclaimed in after years (was it not a prefiguration of the League of Nations?): "Will the time never come when there will be a cosmopolitan citadel, where the sage of each country will represent his nation, and where the rights of humanity will be discussed and respected?"

For the moment, Sarah stayed in the besieged city, thinking that such was the duty of every young and able-bodied person, and also because she would not for anything in the world seem to be running away from danger. But her lack of occupation was painful to her. She desired to translate her love of country into action, and collaborate effectively in the work of defense. She was not long in realizing that the best way of making herself useful was in caring for the wounded. But where should she install her hospital? Where, if not in her beloved theater, the Odéon, scene of her first artistic successes?

No sooner was permission obtained than she consecrated herself body and soul to her new apostolate. prodigal both of her fortune and of her strength. Her countless influential friends, who could no longer, on account of the circumstances, advance her theatrical glory, should at least help her to save her protégés. Sarah was indefatigable, going about perpetually, begging here and there for bread, coal, meat, requisitioning coats and blankets from her friends. Never did she return empty-handed from these expeditions. Thanks to these daily raids, the hospital at the Odéon was one of the best-provided in Paris. The actress watched day and night over the welfare of the wounded who had been entrusted to her, seconded by the unfailing Mme. Guérard, who did not desert her young friend in these difficult hours.

During these tragic days, face to face with these terribly mutilated human beings, in the midst of the most frightful agonies that can be dreamed of, Sarah conquered her nerves, overcame her disgust and weakness. She lived what seemed an unreal existence, so great was her activity, and her faculties were as if multiplied tenfold by necessity.

Now came the heroic period when Paris, despite the treachery of its leaders, refused to yield. Gambetta had just been sent into the provinces, where he was to organize the resistance—a departure which took place to the great satisfaction of those who found his "fight to the finish" attitude troublesome. Chanzy pursued his infernal retreat. The enemy army encircled Paris,

and famine reigned within. In front of the bakers' shops, lines of gaunt, pallid housewives waited in the thawing mud beneath an icy north wind. To add to the general misery, the Prussians bombarded the capital. From time to time there fell clusters of fire which, on striking the ground, exploded in murderous fragments, sowing the streets of Paris with panic and blindly sacrificing women, children and old men. One night the bombardment became so intense that the wounded in the Odéon hospital had to be removed hastily into the cellars of the old theater; a desperate solution, which could only be provisional.

The siege of Paris, however, was drawing to an end. The city still refused to capitulate. But, after the Buzenval sortie, Trochu spoke again, and imperiously, of negotiations. Then the public learned that Jules Favre was at Versailles, conferring with Bismarck. Anger and stupefaction prevailed. But events hurried forward, and on January 28th the armistice was signed.

The disarmed soldiers now filed through the streets, with bowed heads. The peace terms imposed on the vanquished were painful, and destined to plant in the hearts of the French the deadly seed of revenge.

Some days before the armistice, Sarah Bernhardt had been compelled to give up her hospital, forced out of the cellars by the rats and the rising water. Meanwhile she had learnt, through the American consul, that her mother and her family had taken refuge in Hamburg. Ill at ease in the dismal capital, where everyone remained shut indoors to avoid the sight of the

conquerors, she decided to join them. Her journey was not uneventful; there were difficulties at her departure in obtaining a safe-conduct, and various incidents occurred on the way, some comic, some sinister. At last, after ten days, Sarah was able to embrace her nearest and dearest. But she was immediately seized by homesickness for Paris, and she lost no time in setting out on the homeward road, dragging all her "smalah" with her.

The capital of France, which she had left a fortnight before exhausted by a four months' siege, overwhelmed by the bitter humiliation of defeat, was already rumbling with threats of an eruption. And after Paris besieged came the Paris of the Commune.

Sarah Bernhardt retired to Saint-Germain-en-Laye. There she awaited the end of the storm, counting the days, full of impatient hope that she might soon resume her interrupted career as an actress.

To escape from boredom, she went every day for long rides on horseback through the woods, in the company of Captain O'Connor, the future general of Algerian fame. In her retreat, echoes reached her of the pitiless struggle that was being waged so near at hand. When in her rides she ventured as far as the forest of Versailles, she was suffocated by the smell of gunpowder with which the atmosphere was laden, and returned at full gallop to Saint-Germain, horrified by the atrocious spectacles she imagined. One day, from the terrace of the old château of Saint-Germain, she witnessed the burning of Paris. The Communards

had just accomplished the last desperate gesture of their heroic resistance. The men of Versailles entered Paris.

The echo of Gallifet's last bullets died away. The pavements of Paris were still stained in places by the blood of the rebels; blackened ruins were still smoking. Nevertheless, under the sardonic smile of M. Thiers, the poor city gradually recovered an aspect of calm and quiet. No doubt there still remained many wounds to be bound, many rancors which were far from being extinguished. But already life had resumed its course. There was laughter in the streets, animation in the cafés. Lovers kissed. The theaters reopened. The rest? The rest was past, and the past was already far away.

At the second National Theater, they hastily repaired the damaged buildings, rebuilt walls, replaced seats, benches, scenery. Soon the joyous hubbub of the green-room reunited the actors who had survived the storm, happy to meet again. The evil days were spoken of lightly, and they talked, above all, of the future.

Among the company, a slender young woman, with coppery hair and a pale face, seemed to be the queen of them all. Sarah Bernhardt, like the rest, had passed through the storm, but her will had not been undermined. After these long months of artistic inactivity, she found herself once more at her post, more than ever resolute to pursue her ambitious destiny, rich in the new strength which she owed to adversity.

~ XI ~

Like an Evil Nightmare, the memory of the terrible year faded gradually away. Optimism was reborn, and with it gaiety. After the rude experiences they had undergone, the people of Paris aspired to a renewal of happiness.

The Odéon had taken up its repertory again, but business proceeded with difficulty. During rehearsals, Chilly, his little round hat perched on the top of his head, strode up and down in a surly temper, dissatisfied with himself and everyone else, and ready to fly into a rage on the most unreasonable pretext. The heroes of the classics succeeded one another on the stage. But the only response provoked by the old repertory was the clamor of the students, who demanded indefatigably: "Victor Hugo! Ruy Blas!"

A few days after the fall of the Empire, the famous exile had made a triumphal entry into Paris. During the siege and the Commune his grandiose eloquence had rung forth, bringing to the nation in its most painful hours words of consolation, justice and humanity. The outlaw of yesterday had at once become the living symbol of the Republic. He was worshiped now as the god of Democracy. And as soon as the calm was sufficient to allow of the leisure propitious

to literature, his works, written in exile, enjoyed a tremendous vogue. General opinion raised the man, as well as his work, to a pinnacle, and the theatergoing public demanded, more and more imperiously, the revival of the great dramas of which the Empire had deprived them.

The Odéon, therefore, must needs defer to the popular will. The public wanted Victor Hugo; well, they should have Victor Hugo! And the second National Theater decided to inaugurate the new Hugo era with the piece of greatest topical interest, that which was called for every evening by the youth of the Latin Quarter: Ruy Blas.

This news aroused great emotion in Sarah Bernhardt. Perhaps, confusedly, she understood already that her real career as a dramatic artist, the most brilliant that can be dreamed of, was only now beginning, and that it was reserved for the poet of the "Légende des Siècles" to usher in her destiny. Be this as it may, no sooner was she informed of the proposed revival of Ruy Blas than she manifested a strong desire to obtain the part of the Oueen. She knew that this favor would not be granted her easily. For a rival she had Jane Essler, an actress very much in vogue who, besides a solidly established reputation, was not without influential friends. Duquesnel was won in advance to Sarah's cause, and would undoubtedly support her candidature, but his assistance was clearly insufficient. The young actress must fight for the part if she would win it, must wrest it from her rival by her own merits.

Just then, Jean Marie, a drama by André Theuriet, was being rehearsed; Sarah had been allotted the part of the gentle, melancholy young heroine. She worked at this creation with the ardor of a neophyte—an ardor to which was added her already long experience as an actress.

In Jean Marie, Sarah met with the acclamations of a public which became ever more enthusiastic. The dramatic critics were forced to grant her attention, and Francisque Sarcey this time abounded in eulogies particularly flattering to the actress: "Nothing could be more artlessly poetic than this young woman, who will become a great actress and is already an admirable artist. Is she pretty? It is impossible to decide. She is thin of body and sad of face. But she has sovereign grace and compelling charm. She is an artist by nature and an incomparable interpreter. There is nobody like her at the Comédie-Française. What a performance she would give in Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle, to say nothing of the Junies and Athalies of the old repertoire! And to think that there is no one at the Comédie for these parts!"

Sarah was not as yet thinking of reentering the "Maison de Molière." Her will and her desires were concentrated for the moment on one sole aim: to play the Queen of Spain in Ruy Blas. They were destined to triumph. The young artist had calculated aright, and satisfaction was not long in coming to her. The success of her creation in Jean Marie overcame the arguments which were raised in opposition to her. She soon re-

ceived a notice requesting her to present herself at the first rehearsal of Ruy Blas.

Sarah, on the eve of her appearance in Ruy Blas, was over twenty-seven years of age. She had already nearly ten years' experience of her work. Conscious of having reached the decisive moment of her career, she was resolved to leave nothing to chance. She would work at her royal part indefatigably, for she wished her creation to achieve a rare triumph. And if, in the past, Le Passant had marked a stage in her success, Ruy Blas was to mark a new stage, and one of far greater importance in her life.

In the course of the rehearsals, old Hugo lost his heart to the interpreter of his heroine. He followed her movements about the stage with unquiet yet fascinated eyes, and at every pose overwhelmed her with delightful compliments, always original, as he bent gallantly to kiss her hand.

He who was known in some literary circles as the Master, and in others as the Monster, was then an old man of sixty-seven, charming, affable, with burning eyes beneath a monumental forehead. His smiling, unaffected urbanity, his witty style of conversation, allied to his unequaled prestige, won the most rebellious spirits in the end. The old man had a miraculous capacity for work. His literary labors were prodigious. But this exceptional cerebral activity had never made him unmindful of the lesser joys of existence. There were many legends current as to his persistent and lively youthfulness. His enemies quoted racy anecdotes

of which he was the hero. Now, at the moment of his apotheosis, he was the favorite of women no less than the master of the young, the idol of the humble and the Messiah of the republicans.

Sarah, owing to the influence of her entourage, which had always held the reactionary views of the middle classes, was prejudiced against the great man: but she soon softened towards him. Hitherto, while admiring the works of the most celebrated of the Romantics, she had judged him, as a man, severely. She saw in Hugo the rebel, the renegade. At her first interviews with the poet, her attitude had been cold, and even a little hostile. Soon, however, her opinion was modified. Victor Hugo was the best man one could possibly meet. When she realized this, the artist listened willingly to the Master; she sought his conversation, his advice; and the genius of this man whom she had once so foolishly misjudged aided her to discover new perspectives even in her own art. She understood that she would perhaps owe to him an important share of her success. And apart from that, accustomed as she was to the facile compliments and banal sentimentalities of the men who surrounded her, she was touched by the precious homage of a poet. She divined that the respectful attentiveness with which he kissed her hand consecrated her talent far more than the worship lavished upon her by her usual little Court.

During the two months' rehearsals of Ruy Blas, Sarah was the prey of an intense excitement. She ate little and slept badly. By the time the great day was at hand, all her strength seemed destroyed. And yet she

was fanatically certain of success, convinced that she would reveal her powers unforgetably; and she made a vow, should she fail, never to appear on the stage again.

On January 26th, 1872, the stalls, dress-circle and boxes of the Odéon were packed with all the "first-nighters" of Paris, whilst the tumultuous crowd of students crammed the dusty amphitheater.

Sarah Bernhardt, at the moment of her entry on the stage, could scarcely walk, and turned so pale as she spoke her first words that her fellow-actors, watching from the wings, expected to see her faint. The most violent attack of stage fright stiffened her gestures and stifled her voice. For an instant she stopped entirely. But her will, the immense will of Sarah which was always to be her most astonishing virtue, quickly triumphed over this passing moment of weakness. She steeled her nerves, and gently recovered her sang-froid. From that moment, an unprecedented emotion took possession of the audience. All enchanted, all in love with this Queen who thus fascinated and disquieted them, they became unconscious of themselves until the end of the act, when they proceeded, by shouts and applause, to give violent utterance to their passionate enthusiasm.

Sarah was crushed by her happiness. The theater still vibrated with acclamations of the author and his interpreter. The artist's dressing-room received the usual stream of admirers of both sexes. And when Victor Hugo in his turn succeeded in making his way to her, the actress, her eyes full of tears, her throat constricted with emotion, her head whirling, did not know how to express to him her profound gratitude. But, before she had even time to open her mouth, the great man himself fell on one knee, kissed her hands and murmured with a trembling voice: "Merci! Merci!"

Confused and delighted, Sarah Bernhardt felt finally compensated by this moment alone for her years of waiting, her rancors, her past uncertainties, the humiliations she had suffered, her defeats, and all the injustices of fate and of men.

This memorable creation insensibly went to the young woman's head. She was flattered when she heard, in conversation and in the Press, demands for her reentry into the Comédie-Française. Perrin, the present administrator, did not yet make her any official offer, but towards the end of May, when she had already played in Ruy Blas more than eighty times, she learned from an intermediary that a word from her would be sufficient to conclude the affair. Thus, nine years after a sensational expulsion, she was solicited to return! Poor Nathalie! What has become of your all-powerful influence before the nascent glory of the fragile Sarah Bernhardt? The young artist's "vengeance" was more complete than she could ever have hoped for in the past, even in her extremest fits of arrogance.

Nevertheless, Sarah hesitated. She felt a certain melancholy at the thought of leaving this antiquated Théâtre de l'Odéon which enclosed within its dusty walls such a treasury of happy memories. It was bitter

to say good-by to the easy comradeship of the wings, the ovations and naïve compliments of the students, and a whole little world which she could never remember without feeling again the never-fading thrill of her first successes. Compared with this joyous dove-cot from which so many youthful hopes had taken flight, the Comédie-Française, with its discipline and its intricate regulations, seemed to her like a prison for wild beasts. But Sarah realized that she must not give way to a vain sentiment. More courageous than ever, she resolved to face the mysteries of the future. To cling to the past meant condemning herself to immobility. After the success of Ruy Blas, the stage of the Odéon was no longer large enough to allow of that expansion of her fame which her spirit so urgently demanded. The "fairy of the students" must now conquer all Paris.

Thus, Sarah resigned herself to the exacting destiny of a "great actress."

But what an uninviting aspect the first National Theater offered! Or was it, perhaps, her unhappy memories of the place which caused her to recoil once more, although in reality her decision was made? An opportunity arose, however, which facilitated the carrying-out of her design. Chilly, close-fisted as ever, refused, in spite of Duquesnel's exhortations, to increase the salary of his *pensionnaire*. After a final conference, the actress quitted the managerial office abruptly, and took a cab to the Comédie-Française.

Perrin received her with many expressions of polite-

ness, and the young artist, conquering her lingering prejudices, then and there signed the contract which, as from the following October, made her a member of the "Maison de Molière."

Meanwhile she remained at the Odéon, going from one success to another. Her colleagues regarded her with amicable envy; Duquesnel lamented her departure. Chilly was furious, and swore that he would bring an action against her for unjustifiable breach of contract. The deserter shrugged her shoulders. What did she care, now?

Victor Hugo, more and more enthusiastic over his heroine, overwhelmed her with praise. "It is the first time this part has ever been acted. This young woman is in very truth a Queen," he exclaimed. And again: "This young woman is adorable. She has more than mere good looks; she has harmonious movements and an irresistible enchantment of expression. She is something better than an artist—she is a woman."

On the occasion of the rooth performance of Ruy Blas, the poet gave a sumptuous supper-party for the members of the cast. At the end of the meal, lifting his glass for a solemn toast, he bowed ceremoniously towards the "Queen," and lauded in eloquent terms her magnificent gifts and her "golden voice."

The phrase became famous. This famous voice was thereafter to acquire a legendary reputation which, knowing no frontiers, soon spread over the five continents.



~ XII ~

Make no mistake: The engagement of Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt at the Comédie-Française is a serious and violently revolutionary fact. Poetry has entered into the house of dramatic art; or, in other words, the wolf is in the sheep-fold."

This outburst of Théodore de Banville's expresses the case fairly accurately. If the triumphant star of the Odéon had hesitated to cross that austere threshold, the Comédie-Française, for its part, offered her a somewhat cool welcome. Misgivings were felt regarding this young woman, whose first engagement there had already been marked by a sensational scandal. The administration was prejudiced in advance against the changeable temper of the actress. The members of the company, foreseeing that all eyes henceforward would be fixed upon her, were jealous. The interest and the prestige of the Comédie had necessitated the engagement of this young celebrity, who for her part had need of this official consecration in order to attain her apogee and give the true measure of her merit. Thus the agreement had been possible, in spite of the apprehensions and prejudices existing on either side, but it was invita invitum that the young actress entered the Théâtre Français.

Her engagement was in a sense demanded by Francisque Sarcey, the interpreter of the general opinion, whose influence was steadily increasing, and who had the ear of the theater managers as well as of the actors. It was to this famous critic, also, that Sarah owed her first part—the title-rôle in Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle.

Hardly had she begun to rehearse the piece before the new *pensionnaire* experienced a sense of constraint which did not cease until after the first public performance. She regretted the Odéon, where the company rehearsed all day, in good spirits, and where they practically lived, as in a favorite dwelling-place. Here, the cast arrived at the prescribed time, like employees in an office or a workshop. They went through their daily task without a sign of interest, pleasure or enthusiasm. Sarah felt unable to breathe freely in this *milieu*, and she longed continually for the familiar home which the Odéon for so long had been to her.

She was afraid of this unkindly theater, where she had once lived through such an unpleasant affair, and she was seized with nervous anxiety at the thought that on November 6th she must make a new début upon its stage. Why had she been so precipitate in leaving the ever-hospitable boards of the Odéon, and why, above all, had she thus delivered herself up to the enemy? For it seemed to her that she was surrounded by hostility. Everything had conspired against her since her departure from the Odéon. She was dissatisfied with her part and afraid of failure. Then there was the gossip of the wings, the malicious

glances which paralyzed her gestures, the tales which were so eagerly circulated about her. Not all the effects of popularity are good. On this point, Sarah had plenty of experience already. But as her fame increased, the attacks of her enemies grew more precise and increased in violence, and they had redoubled during the last few months. The dithyrambs of Victor Hugo found their counterpoise in caricatures, spiteful paragraphs in the minor newspapers, slanderous refrains and couplets. True, the young actress had faithful friendships too, and in the midst of the little Court which met at five every evening in the Rue de Rome, surrounding her with eulogies and flattery, she could forget the baseness of which she was the victim; yet the contrast was bitter and disheartening.

All the seats in the Théâtre Français had been booked long in advance for the evening of November 6th, 1872. Sarah, precisely because she knew that much was expected of her, and that it was principally on her account that the public had turned out, was gripped by her old enemy, stage fright. At her entry on the stage, she was chilled by the alarming silence of this vast auditorium, crowded with spectators eager to scrutinize at their ease the strange creature who had been depicted to them, the heroine of so many fabulous tales.

If the mere presence of Sarah Bernhardt satisfied the curiosity of certain onlookers, the impression she made as an artist was lamentably poor, and the hopes placed upon her were disappointed. Sarcey was the first to express his regret: "It was a disappointment when she appeared. By her costume she had ostentatiously exaggerated a slenderness which is attractive under the wide, flowing garments of the Greek and Roman heroines, but unpleasing in modern costume. She spoke the first three acts with convulsive vocal tremors, and we heard the Sarah of Ruy Blas only in two couplets which she uttered in an enchanting voice and with marvelous grace. But she failed in all the strong passages. I doubt whether Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt will ever force her delightful voice to express the paroxysms of violent passion with those deep, vibrant notes by which an audience is carried away. Had nature granted her this gift, she would be a complete artist, and such do not exist on the stage. Vexed by the coldness of the public, Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt found her true self again in the fifth act. This was indeed our Sarah, the Sarah of Ruy Blas, whom we have admired so much at the Odéon,"

After a few performances, however, the actress, completely adapted to her new part, regained her self-confidence, and with it the whole mastery of her art. Six weeks later, her success was already comparable to those she had experienced at the Odéon.

Afterwards she appeared in *Britannicus*, playing the part of Junie, and the patrons of the Comédie-Française were forced to agree that she did not dishonor the great national stage. In a short time, Sarah even became the favorite of the theater habitués. Students came in bands from the Latin Quarter, and their

hearty ovations, unaccustomed in this austere establishment, occasioned the insinuation that the actress was employing a *claque*. This ridiculous accusation, however, did not trouble Sarah, who was preoccupied with other cares.

At the Comédie the first skirmishes were now being fought in a struggle for supremacy between herself and Sophie Croizette, who for several years had been the jeune première of the company. Both in appearance and in character the two young women were the exact opposites of each other. Croizette was a tall, handsome girl with a fine figure and charming dimples in her smiling face. Her laughter was loud and clear. She was attractive, but commonplace. Sarah, thinner than ever, had a small, fleshless, sorrowful face, prominent cheek-bones, a somber, feverish light in her eyes, a veiled and melancholy diction. She was bizarre, tempestuous, demonic.

With these differences of temperament and aspect, the two artists seemed created to act as a foil to one another on the stage. But there is no field so propitious for intrigues as the theatrical world. Every member of it cultivates his petty vanities and his preferences. Thus, at the beginning of 1873, two rival clans were formed at the Théâtre Français—the Croizettists and the Bernhardtists—whose members fought tooth and nail. Notwithstanding which, the two objects of this struggle, cordial enemies, remained bound by a friendship only occasionally disturbed by passing animosities.

"There was nothing more amusing than to see them leaving after the rehearsals, she (Sarah) and Croizette, followed by their mothers. They went off like two startled goddesses, noses in the air, Rabagas hats set on the back of their enormous blonde wigs, swinging their little umbrellas, talking and laughing at the tops of their voices, so that the passers-by turned around to look after them; then they would go into Chiboust's pâtisserie and stuff themselves with cakes." Thus did Octave Feuillet describe the two rival artists, whom he had opportunities to observe during the rehearsals at the Comédie.

After a perfect creation of the part of Cherubin in Le Mariage de Figaro, and honorable successes in Palila and L'Absent, the perfection of Sarah's acting could no longer be compared with that of any living actress. But she deplored the fact that she was condemned to play almost exclusively in comedy. Her predilections were towards tragedy, for which she had been specially trained, and in which she thought she could display the whole measure of her talent. Soon Perrin fulfilled her desire by entrusting to her the part of Andromaque.

On August 22nd, Racine's play was the occasion of a fresh triumph both for Sarah and for another deserter from the Odéon, Mounet-Sully, who played opposite her in the part of Oreste.

What a marvelous artist Mounet-Sully was then! And handsome into the bargain—the stature of an athlete, with the face of an Apollo. His glowing voice caressed the crowds, fascinated by his ardent eyes. He was thirty-two, Sarah twenty-nine. He and she were the two glories of the Théâtre Français: everything, their talent, their distinction, their success, tended to draw them together. Partners in so many passionate scenes upon the stage, how could they do otherwise than take up the same rôles for themselves in real life?

Sarah afterwards kept the most perfect memories of this love-affair. Nevertheless, it would be misunderstanding her to believe that she was happy, blessed as she was both with the love of this ideal Don Juan and with the idolatry of the public. From her mother she inherited a tendency to neurasthenia. She was a woman eternally unsatisfied, who never found an anchor for her desires. Always with the same impatience, she aspired towards an absolute, vague but irresistibly fascinating. Her sentimental experiences melted away like her artistic successes; both left her with a never-satisfied longing for a greater perfection. But as there must be ports of call in this restless, hazardous voyage towards the unknown, Sarah treated her daily life as others treat their country holidays and wildly lavished all the trifling satisfactions she could obtain upon her sensibility and her vanity. She did not control her caprices, but destroyed them by satisfying them. She made herself drunk with champagne to achieve a little gaiety. She plunged into wild tours through the French country-side. At home, she installed a perfect menagerie, thus creating around her a permanent atmosphere of eccentricity.

Unfortunately for her, these fancies were not well received by public opinion. Sarah's way of living, her clothes, her originality appeared - and were, in fact -a defiance of the manners of the age. She was simply giving a free rein to her capricious personality, and also perhaps reacting against the narrowness of accepted customs and of the conceptions which were then de rigueur, but morbid inclinations were imputed to her; she was accused of sadism, and the rumor went abroad, even, that she amused herself by torturing the animals which she collected about her. The upper and lower middle classes of this post-1870 France were at once intrigued and shocked by her. The general curiosity of which she was the object was not content with pulling to pieces her present life, ferreting through the contents of her desk, burrowing into her private affairs to satisfy its thirst; her origins were also attacked, and she was accused of not being a true Frenchwoman. The exacerbated nationalism which succeeded the defeat contributed its share, and she barely escaped the charge of spying on behalf of the enemy.

Usually more or less indifferent to satires and calumnies, Sarah reacted strongly when her nationality was suspected, and defended herself with considerable vigor. She was born in Paris; the only language she knew was French. For the rest, her mother (she alleged) was not German, but Dutch. She went so far as to employ casuistry to confuse the terms of her birth certificate. Her reply to Jouvin, a journalist who had expressed doubts as to her nationality, ran thus: "I am French, absolutely French. I proved it during the siege of Paris, and the Société d'Encouragement au Bien awarded me a medal. Would the Société have done this for a German? All my family is of Dutch origin. . . . If I have an accent (and I regret it very much), my accent is cosmopolitan, not Teutonic. I am a daughter of the great Jewish race, and the slight roughness of my speech reflects our forced wanderings. In a word, monsieur, I demand the rectification of an error prejudicial to my son's future and painful to my heart, which is that of a Frenchwoman."

For the first time in her public career, Sarah took the initiative in refuting her detractors. She did so with rancor and without modesty; and from this time forth she continued to reply to the newspaper articles which attacked her from various quarters, overwhelming the Press with "rectifications" and "statements."

Andromaque had established her as a tragedienne. A month later she was given the rôle of Aricie, a rôle which she had already performed at the Odéon without attracting the least attention. Now, however, her masterly acting rendered this secondary character the principal interest of the play.

Racine, after all, had always been her favorite author; why should he not be the most successful author for her on the stage? She was not yet allowed to play Phèdre. It was her ambition to act this great and cele-

brated part, but Perrin did not seem disposed to grant it her at present. The administrator of the Comédie-Française, an extreme autocrat, did not accept the headstrong character of his new pensionnaire with tolerance. The young woman's tantrums provoked him to genuine anger. He much preferred simple, sweet-tempered Croizette to the haughty "Mlle. Révolte." The latter could not, therefore, hope to profit by any favoritism in obtaining the parts she desired. On the contrary, she must advance step by step, without any short cuts.

Little by little the actress became convinced that far from having achieved the aim which she had in view of reentering the Théâtre Français, she was now face to face with new difficulties, more serious than those of the past. The theatrical career was crowded, and full of snares. Sarah was besieged by melancholy reflections. Even should she attain her wishes, she would, indeed, still have a sense of frustration; for her enemy was within herself. But for the first time she lost faith in her art, and judged it disappointing in itself. After painful meditations, she reached the conclusion that the ideal to which she had vowed her life was but a subordinate, a parasitic form of art. She thought that the fame of the actor had its roots in the genius of the dramatic author and the ingenuity of the producer. She clung to this opinion tenaciously, with a sort of angry pleasure. Sarah was changeable and many-sided, but always persistent and obstinate in the craze of the moment. Now, in the autumn of

1873, she suddenly discovered that the histrionic art did not give her scope to develop all the resources of her intelligence, all the powers of her genius, and to realize her desire to create. For she was weary of interpreting other people's thoughts, serving other people's creations. She wished, in her turn, to create, to give birth to a durable work, which should survive her death and keep the name of Sarah Bernhardt alive for posterity.

Where is this adventurous, insatiable spirit now to find sustenance? How is it to nourish its dreams of immortality?

~ XIII ~

Thus, she no longer felt anything but indifference for the theater. But Sarah Bernhardt could not remain inactive; for some time her mind abandoned itself successively to the most incongruous whims, until one day she discovered an irresistible penchant for sculpture.

No sooner was the decision made than she went to ask the famous sculptor, Mathieu Meusnier, to give her lessons. Though at first considerably bewildered by the young actress's invasion of his studio, the master was flattered, and acceded to her wish.

Sarah hastened to rent a smart studio in the Boulevard de Clichy, on the "heights" of Paris. After a few preliminary counsels from her teacher, having barely grasped the merest rudiments of her new art, she deliberately set to work upon a large-scale composition. Her ardor was unbounded, and so was her joy. She was persuaded that she had only now found her true vocation, having been put on the wrong track long ago by a thoughtless word from the Duc de Morny, against whom she developed a retrospective grudge. What might her skill have been by now, but for the unfortunate suggestion of that haughty nobleman! She was devoured by regret at the idea of the lost years, thrown away in the delusive pursuit of a

fleeting success and the empty glory of the boards. How many useless struggles, unnecessary sorrows and bitter disillusionments she might have been spared! For she did not doubt that if she had been left free, some twelve years earlier, to direct her own fate, a sure instinct would soon have guided her to the present aim of her ambitions.

A most obstinate will was ever the dominant quality of Sarah Bernhardt. We have seen her win, by sheer fighting, her celebrity as an actress—at the price of what efforts, what sacrifices forced upon her pride! From this time on, she expended the same energy and tenacity to attain the new aim which she had imposed upon herself.

She spent the best part of her time in her studio on the Boulevard de Clichy; thither her multitudinous devotees now betook themselves if they wished to see her. It was a spacious room, large and light enough to satisfy a Michael Angelo. The decoration and furnishings were naturally most luxurious, as was fitting for such an elegant artist. The confusion which reigned there was too manifest, too ostentatious, not to have been more or less designed. Divans, armchairs, screens, formed a heterogeneous muddle. Exotic hangings, mountains of cushions, antiques, old masters, ornaments and ivories gave the place the air of a sale room. But the atmosphere was very "Montmartre." The studio looked out over Paris, which spread its bristling field of roofs as far as the eye could see. And at dusk, as she leaned at her window before the

spectacle of the city, now flushed by the setting sun, while the sounds of the evening were lost in the muffled atmosphere, Sarah became as sentimental as a grisette, and as enthusiastic as a young art student. Here was all the romance of la vie de Bohème. Not one picturesque detail of the legend was lacking—not even the amorous howling of the cats, prowling about the gutters during the warm summer nights. . . .

What more is needed besides this setting - one might say, this "production" - to establish a sculptress? Obviously, an adequate costume! Sarah had not forgotten this indispensable attribute, and displayed considerable individuality in her choice. She decided in favor of a white blouse and white trousers. A white costume must be strictly plain, but, since the rights of vanity are never abrogated, the young woman softened the severity of the uniform by a collar and cuffs of fine lace. White sandals and a tulle scarf, artistically knotted, completed a highly successful ensemble. No doubt these adornments smacked somewhat of the amateur. What of it! Who would dare to reproach Sarah Bernhardt — even in her new capacity of a sculptress - with her originality and fancifulness? This extravagant costume suited her; she was more exquisite than ever, and the Court which surrounded her, as always, admired and applauded.

For that matter, it was understood that everything was perfect in the studio on the Boulevard de Clichy: the artist, the works, the untidiness, the dust, and even the execrable tea which was served hastily, as a mat-

ter of tradition, about five o'clock, and which here acquired a delicious savor from the aroma of clay which pervaded the place. All this had an air of improvisation, of happy-go-lucky bohemianism, which it would be very bad taste to laugh at. Affectation, said the spiteful tongues. But did not Marie Antoinette play at being a dairy-maid at the Trianon? Why refuse Sarah the right to play at being a sculptress on the heights of Montmartre? There is so much charm about these tilts at conventional life!

The Clichy studio was soon famous in Paris: and contradictory rumors were circulated on the subject. Many people stated definitely that the actress intended to abandon the theater altogether and devote herself entirely to sculpture. Generally, however, they were not content with such simple interpretations as this. The malicious curiosity of the public sought at all costs to find some positive explanation for these whims of an ever-restless spirit which it was incapable of understanding. If the young woman dressed herself in male costume, was this not an evident sign of abnormal tendencies? Even the most indulgent considered her attire to be in doubtful taste. The mysterious atmosphere of the studio seemed a perfect setting for scenes of debauchery, and scabrous reports were spread about as to the champagne orgies of Sarah and her associates. It did not take long for rumor to transform the slightly theatrical studio on the Boulevard de Clichy into an infamous haunt where scandal and horror vied for precedence.

The apprentice-sculptress, when the first echoes of these rumors reached her, began by treating them with derision. But when the equivocal reports swelled in volume, she soon became indignant. The artist denied these turpitudes; she explained herself, justified herself, appealed to unprejudiced persons and to all people of good-will. Her costume? Was it not the most practical dress for her new work? Sarah exerted all her skill in pleading her cause before her friends, who joined in a chorus of agreement.

But, heavens! how stupid the world is! One fine evening she worked herself up into such an excitement that she knocked the newly begun bust of her sister Régina on to the floor, drove all her guests out of the place, scattered the fragments with furious kicks, and flung herself on the divan in an excess of weeping which shook her with sobs until the morning. However, when dawn crept into the studio, Sarah stood up suddenly, dabbed her reddened eyes, shook her tawny hair, rearranged her scarf-knot in front of the mirror and, kneeling on the floor, picked up with meticulous care the remnants of her work. Then, seizing her chisel, she courageously set to work once more. After all, what did the world's opinion matter to her! She would follow her course.

Her passion for sculpture had not made her abandon the theater entirely. If she acted but seldom, this was primarily because few parts were offered her. No doubt her sense of disappointment with the dramatic art, and the consequent development of her vocation

as a sculptress, were not unrelated to the inaction to which Perrin apparently wished to condemn her. The utterly uninteresting characters that she was made to play intensified her dissatisfaction. All the important creations went to Croizette, the administrator's favorite. The intervention of the Ministre des Beaux-Arts was necessary to induce him to allot Sarah an interesting part in *Le Sphinx*, by Octave Feuillet. Sarah studied this new part without great keenness. Her chief aim, during the performances, was to display ease, lightness and high spirits, in which she succeeded without difficulty, since these qualities were natural to her.

She awaited the end of each rehearsal with impatience, anxious to get back as quickly as possible to her studio, which for the time being was her refuge. Her sculpture helped her to bear the difficult and disappointing aspects of her theatrical life, and enabled her to behave with the careless merriment described by Octave Feuillet: "She comes to rehearse, dressed in the height of fashion, or at least dressed carefully in her own fashion; she is all in velvet, with a velvet jacket, a black lace scarf wrapped round her chest, and always with a ruff collar. In this outfit, with her short, curly hair, and generally clutching a few bunches of fresh flowers, she rehearses her part with considerable care, and with the somber gravity it requires. . . . When the act is over, she breaks abruptly into a ballet step, hops about the stage, seats herself at the piano and accompanies herself in a bizarre negro

dance-tune which she sings in a very pretty voice. Then she rises and begins to march about, taking long strides like a clown, laughs in your face as she munches the chocolates with which her pockets are filled, takes from a case a little hare's-foot which she passes over her lips to restore their carmine, shows her teeth, white as fresh almonds, and goes on munching chocolates."

In spite of this gaiety, the young woman was at this time in very bad health. When, during June and July, she had to rehearse Zaïre, she was constantly spitting blood. It was alleged that she was suffering from tuberculosis and had only six months to live. She herself thought that she was doomed. But, with a kind of childish obstinacy, she forced herself to act nevertheless. She wished to act herself to death and thus give a lesson to Perrin who, refusing her leave of absence, compelled her to appear on the stage during these dogdays.

However, Sarah's constitution resisted these imprudences. An unsuspected robustness lay concealed under that frail and sickly surface. Sarah herself was astonished at her powers of endurance, and finally was convinced that she had under-estimated her physical strength. Thenceforward she decided to abandon the attitude of a fragile creature always on the point of death. She proposed to become strong, energetic, vigorous. For she was immoderate in everything.

But, while she was thus laying hold on life again, the disease was slowly destroying one who was dear to her. Young Régina was gravely infected. Her agony was to last six months. In the large bamboo bed which her sister had given up to her, the pale face of the consumptive almost disappeared under the lace of the bedclothes. Sarah lavished tender, attentive cares upon her, and fell asleep by her side at night when she had kept watch too long.

Deprived of her bed, she had developed the habit of sleeping in her coffin. The eccentric tastes of the actress sometimes took a macabre turn. For some time this curious article of furniture, of ebony, lined with white satin, had been the great attraction of the entresol in the Rue de Rome. Just as she had found a certain pleasure in drawing up a fantastic will (which she eventually burnt), Sarah had also conceived the idea of ordering her final couch while yet living. Expecting one day to be placed there for her last sleep, she sometimes laid herself in it, to prepare for her part. She even had herself photographed lying there, enveloped in a long, immaculate shroud, in the attitude of a corpse—eyes closed, arms crossed upon the breast, with flowers, wreaths and palms upon her winding-sheet and a candle burning on the table beside her. Undoubtedly there was a great deal of affectation in this funereal jest, but it may be doubted whether the desire to be unusual at any price was the sole motive inspiring Sarah with these ghoulish ideas. When she was in the grip of illness and thought herself condemned, she had wished to prepare for the great journey with calm, anxious to persuade others

—and herself too, no doubt—that she was not afraid of death. Therefore she had accustomed herself to the accessories of death, hoping that her premature end would thereby be easier to bear.

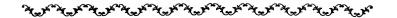
But it was not she who was claimed by death. Though she lay in the coffin every night, it was poor Régina, lying in the bed, who was to be the first victim of fate.

After the young girl's death a gruesomely comic incident occurred. Entering the room where the body lay, the undertakers were surprised by the presence of two coffins and also two corpses, for Mme. Julie Bernard, worn out by fatigue and grief, had fainted beside her daughter's body. Sarah arrived just in time to prevent them from carrying off her own coffin and her still unconscious mother.

It was not long before the whole town, hearing of this adventure, knew that Sarah Bernhardt was in the habit of sleeping in a coffin. The scandal it provoked was enormous. This new eccentricity, in conjunction with the painful circumstances which had made its revelation possible, aroused indignation in many minds. Superstitious people almost held the artist responsible for her sister's death. The most indulgent disapproved of her, feeling repulsion at the thought of this perversity, so much contrary to accepted usages.

Whilst public opinion was thus devouring this "sacrilege," Sarah, overwhelmed by sorrow and exhausted by sitting up night after night, had to take

to her bed. She was seriously anæmic, and the doctor advised her to take a rest somewhere in the South. Sarah accepted the suggestion with alacrity. She packed her trunks, and announced that she was leaving for Mentone. But she took the train, not for the Riviera, but for Brittany, the "land of her dreams."



~ XIV ~

SARAH BERNHARDT DID NOT REAPPEAR in Paris until the autumn. The sea air had set her up again to some extent, but she had tired herself by excursions over the cliffs, carried out with her usual lack of moderation.

Back again in the capital, she at first led a retired life. She devoted all her returning strength to sculpture. As Perrin did not offer her any new parts to create, she only acted from time to time the pieces already in her repertoire. Her time was spent in her studio on the Boulevard de Clichy, where she formed confident hopes around her destiny as a sculptress.

An event which could not have been foreseen was to bring her back abruptly to the stage. She was invited, conditionally, to take the part of Phèdre, her lifelong ambition. The choice of Sarah to play Racine's heroine was due to a mere chance. Mlle. Roussel, the only tragedienne at the Comédie-Française, was in conflict with the administration; she had threatened to give up her part unless the committee undertook to nominate her as a sociétaire in the following January, and the committee, refusing to cede to this pressure which was too much like blackmail, immediately turned to Sarah as an alternative. Nothing, however, appeared to be definite as yet, for who could say

whether Mlle. Roussel, in face of this unexpected turn of events, would not deem it prudent to change her tactics and reconsider her decision? In which case, Sarah would revert to her habitual rôle in the play, that of Aricie.

Once she had been officially sounded, after she had recovered from her joy at the realization of a persistent and long-standing desire, Sarah could not help feeling some apprehension. It was a terrible responsibility that was being offered her. She thought of backing out, but it had already been announced everywhere (even by means of posters) that the character of Phèdre would shortly be interpreted by Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt. The actress knew that her career would be damaged by the slightest weakness in her performance more than it could be enhanced by the most brilliant success. Unable to draw back, she determined to devote all her energy and all her patience to the exceptional part that had fallen to her. She threw a dust-sheet over her models, and relegated her white uniform to the hanging-cupboard. Then she began conscientiously to rehearse in front of a mirror, studying herself, a method to which she had only rarely had recourse during her long career.

On December 21st, 1874, before the performance began, Mounet-Sully, who was to play Hippolyte, was trying to encourage an anxious Phèdre. The announcement that the famous part was to be taken by Sarah Bernhardt had provoked the curiosity and excited the interest of artistic and literary circles. It was clear that a gala-night audience was to be assembled in the theater. Once more, tenacious despite her perplexity, Sarah, before facing the audience, promised herself not to disappoint the hopes of which she was the object.

The long triumph of the evening was to dissipate her uncertainty completely, and finally assure her confidence in her destiny.

Mounet-Sully and Sarah Bernhardt, by common consent, had surpassed themselves. The Press was unanimous in praise. Here is one article which sums up all the rest: "Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt entirely fulfilled the expectations of the public. We were certain beforehand that she would bring to this part, never previously performed by her, the eminent qualities which are hers: great poetic feeling, harmonious diction, a knowledge of the value of restraint, and that cunning art of the noble gesture, the statuesque attitude, which reminds us of Rachel. . . . The manner in which she fell upon her knees, victim of a kind of hallucination, upon the word 'Pardonne!' sent a quiver through the auditorium. She beheld Minos, her judge, and the audience saw him with her. As for the passages which did not demand great force, she excelled in these, and I doubt whether the famous speech of the love-declaration has ever been spoken with more contained passion or a more delicate sense of the fine shades of expression. This first attempt, in a word, does Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt the greatest honor."

Sarah had attained the topmost point of French

dramatic art. Already a great comedy actress, she had now become a great tragedienne, and the comparison with Rachel was inevitable. Is it not curious, incidentally, that each of these two famous artists, Rachel and Sarah Bernhardt, gave her "maximum" in this same part, Phèdre? Yet there is nothing but difference between the appearance and interpretation of the two actresses. Rachel was of commanding build and regal carriage; her whole person exhaled an impression of strength and majesty. Her voice was deep, almost masculine. She was the Phèdre of violent, wilful passion. Sarah Bernhardt, on the contrary, was small, and whatever epithets may have been invented to glorify her slenderness, it is impossible to describe her as majestic. Her suppleness recalled the undulating, feline movements of the panther. Her gestures were nervous rather than noble. Her weak voice was not striking, but penetrating, insidious. The passion by which she was shaken had not the furious élan portraved by her predecessor, but she seemed all the more touching in consequence. Sarah expressed such weariness, such pain, that the whole audience suffered with her.

Rachel had been the incarnation of academic perfection, the ideal of the classical heroine; her acting prolonged the memory of antique tragedy. Sarah was the herald of a new, and far more human, school.

The conception of Phèdre, not as a fury, but as a creature terrified by her own feelings, which Sarah Bernhardt's interpretation offered to the intellectual world, caused an immense amount of discussion. Certain critics whose principles were upset by this daring innovation were alarmed, and demanded that tradition be respected. But what were their voices against the growing enthusiasm of all who did not take their standards of beauty from text-books? The public, which is in a sense nearer to truth than the critics, because it trusts to a sensibility not falsified by the professional habit of mind, was conquered. When people saw this unknown Phèdre upon the stage, trembling, moaning, weeping, they forgot their accumulated disapproval of the actress: the boxing of Nathalie's ears, the flight to Spain, the affair of the fire, the male costume, eccentricities of every kind; all was pardoned in a wave of enthusiasm. After Phèdre, no matter what she might do henceforth, the enfant terrible of the Comédie-Française was "adopted" by the majority.

Though more or less reconciled to the dramatic career, Sarah still did not abandon her sculpture. She decided to send the bust, now completed, of her dead young sister to the Salon. The committee, when the work was presented to them, could not prevent a smile. The execution was at once childish and pretentious. But such was the celebrity of its author that they hesitated to refuse her creation; the bust should have its place at the Salon. It did not fail to attract attention, and, insignificant though it was, Paris ordained that it was good taste to admire the work signed by Sarah Bernhardt. This aroused some irrita-

tion among professional sculptors. The infatuation of the crowd for such a miserable object shocked them; it was unfair competition, prejudicial to the interests of true art, and this whim of a spoiled child of fame was judged severely by them. Rodin, the great Rodin, was indignant. Never in the habit of mincing his words, he declared roundly that this bust was "tripe," and that the public were fools to waste their time on it. Rodin showed all the less indulgence towards what some ironically called "the first work of a confrère," since he felt no sympathy for the actress, whose pretentions and eccentricities, far from impressing him, exasperated him in the extreme. Sarah none the less continued to practise sculpture, although this art seemed unlikely to bring her, in the end, the satisfactions she had hoped from it. To learn was painful to this highly strung nature, impatient to attain perfection at the first flight. Intolerant of all positive apprenticeship, she was soon to be caught up in a new craze, which deflected her for a time from the art of sculpture.

Having come into a small legacy, the actress resolved to build herself a house in the Avenue de Villiers. She entrusted the drawing of the plans to Félix Escalier, who was then very much in vogue. Early in the morning the young actress would join the architect on the site of the house, climbing about the scaffolding, hoisting herself on to the platforms. In the midst of the activity of the masons she forgot her theatrical troubles, her little disappointments as a

sculptress; she was happy thus, and quickly convinced herself that the art of architecture would exactly suit her aptitudes.

Once the construction was finished, however, she thought only of decorating the interior in a striking manner. She therefore brought into the new building a band of painters and sculptors of her acquaintance, who, for the honor of pleasing their celebrated friend, lavished their talents, their ingenuity, vying in their ardor to adorn the walls and ceilings. There were some talented personalities among them, as, for instance, Georges Clairin, who was responsible for the frescoes at the Opéra.

From morning till night the joyful exuberance of these young men echoed through the empty rooms. The days fled by in the rush of absorbing occupations. Sarah only left her new dwelling for the Montmartre studio, where she had kept up the habit of receiving her friends at five o'clock. In this setting, her receptions preserved the charm of their impromptu character and their artistic informality. The hostess had relaxed her early severity in the choice of her acquaintances. Sarah Bernhardt, now famous, was no longer bound to maintain the same reserve as formerly. To gain the support and approval of society, it was no longer necessary for her to endure the company of "influential people" and other stiff-mannered personages, nor to conform to the dictates of convention. She could now act as she pleased, and accepted no rule but her own whim. But she knew how to maintain a



SARAH BERNHARDT AS PHÈDRE 1873



certain standard of behavior among her little troop, composed of unruly young men, all artists of various kinds and degrees.

In one corner of the studio they discussed politics. In another they played cards. Elsewhere, there were interminable literary arguments. Sarah went from one group to another, giving her opinion on everything. She was at the center of every conversation. In spite of her multifarious occupations, she found time to read the works which attracted fashionable attention; she kept herself up to date as regards literary and artistic activity, and even political events. She attended exhibitions, private views, lectures, concerts. In a word, she was universal. People were amazed that one small head could contain so much knowledge; so much will, to be more exact, for it was thanks to her extraordinary will-power that she succeeded in triumphing over her extreme physical fragility.

Inevitably this feverish, multitudinous life reacted upon the health of the artist. She was increasingly subject to attacks of violent coughing which shook her whole frame. With a shaking hand she would place her crushed handkerchief to her mouth, and often the white material was stained with red. . . . At the theater, after difficult scenes in which she had to force her voice and strain her nerves, she sometimes collapsed in a corner of the stage, and Mounet-Sully would carry her to her dressing-room in a faint. At these moments the young woman's features contracted, as if she were not far from death. But a night

of sound sleep was enough to efface these sinister warnings and restore strength and vigor to Sarah. After these crises of nervous depression which she overcame so jauntily, she would plunge into a mood of extravagant gaiety, enlivening her studio with the laughter of a street-urchin. All the various characters contained within her came to the fore one by one, reminiscences of her great rôles. The Queen in Ruy Blas, Zanetto, Phèdre and the rest spoke and moved in her. . . .

On the stage she was now playing the title-parts in La Fille de Roland, by Bonnier, and in L'Etrangère, by the younger Dumas; the latter part brought her great success. Her active return to the theater was not, however, altogether untroubled. She still believed herself to be sacrificed and treated unfairly by the management and her fellow actors in favor of Croizette. Consequently, she revived her taste for sculpture, which was, on the whole, the best outlet she had found. She took up her abandoned tools again and planned the composition of a vast group, inspired by an old woman she had seen at night-fall in the Baie des Trépassés, during her stay in Brittany. Sarah pressed all her friends into service to discover the model, or rather models, that she required; for the old Breton woman was to hold on her knees the body of a child—the corpse of her grandson, given back to her by the waves which had already carried away three of her children. The artist threw herself into this new task with all her energies. Perched on the scaffolding which had been erected to support her group, she was unaware of the company surrounding her: a company which was not entirely composed of human beings. Bizibouzou, her parrot, and Darwin, her monkey, played about at her side without receiving the least attention. Her friends spoke to her and obtained no answer. Nothing could take her from her occupation. She even forgot when it was time for meals.

The finished work seemed satisfactory, and she decided to show it at the Salon. The exhibition catalogue contains this brief mention: "BERNHARDT (Sarah), born in Paris, pupil of M. Mathieu Meusnier; 11 Boulevard de Clichy. Après la tempête (plaster group).-Portrait of M. D. (bronze bust)." The bust referred to, a very poor affair, passed entirely unnoticed. But the group attracted attention, and provoked so much discussion that at the end of a few days it was famous. Experienced critics perceived in it the clumsy inexperience of an apprentice who, instead of working and studying in obscurity, had the presumption to offer her attempts to the public admiration. Others, pleased by the general effect and careless of details. agreed that the group was passable, but doubted whether it was the work of the signatory. Sarah, angered by this doubt, began an action against Jules Clarétie, one of the audacious critics. But when she learned that the judges had awarded her an honorable mention, she was thrilled with joy.

This Exhibition of 1876 brought the actress an access of fame. Besides the criticisms, favorable or dis-

paraging, which were circulated as to her "group," there was much talk about two portraits of the artist exhibited by her friends Georges Clairin and Louise Abbéma. For Sarah Bernhardt already belonged to that category of individuals whose portraits have a double interest for the public; that of the creator, and that of the model. Three years later, Bastien Lepage in his turn showed a portrait of the actress which was "the" picture of the artistic year.

~ XV ~

Was there a subconscious connection of ideas in her mind between the old Breton woman in her group Après la tempête, weeping over the body of her grandson, and the august patrician Posthumia, imploring mercy for her granddaughter, in Parodi's tragedy Rome vaincue? We may imagine that there was, in view of the keen tenacity with which Sarah Bernhardt, on reading this play at the Comédie-Française, a few months later, demanded the part of the blind septuagenarian. In the end, the management granted her wish. But how was symmetry to be maintained? For the public was accustomed to seeing Sarah Bernhardt and Mounet-Sully play "opposite" each other. To restore equilibrium, Perrin confided the insignificant part of an old fool named Vestxpor to the actor, who by his magnificent acting completely transformed the character and gave to it a profound, Shakespearean interpretation.

Thanks to these two artists, the play, though undistinguished in itself, had a certain vogue. Sarah's personal success was very great. The sticklers for tradition who had been left indifferent or dissatisfied by her creation of Phèdre were conquered this time. Witness the severe Auguste Vitu, who wrote: "Draped like an antique statue, her head crowned

with long tresses of white hair under a matron's veil, Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt made the character of Posthumia the finest of all her creations. No contemporary actress could have rendered this figure with such nobility, sincerity and true sensitiveness. The tears, the real tears, of the public, proved to what a degree she had touched their hearts and minds."

In this new part, Sarah Bernhardt had revealed an unknown aspect of her personality, inexhaustible in its resources. Her distinctive faculty was the ability to remain herself in the most dissimilar rôles, yet without seeming to falsify them. She did not so much adapt herself to the characters she played as adapt them to her own individuality. It was this that made her so fascinating in each of her creations. "She is not an actress in the ordinary sense. She is nature itself, served by a marvelous intelligence, a soul of fire, and the most expressive, melodious voice that has ever enchanted human ears. This woman acts from her heart, from the very core of her being. She is a marvelous, an incomparable, artist; a creature apart, magnificent —in a word, an actress of genius," Francisque Sarcey ventured to write.

Sarah still hastened to hide her new laurels in the confusion of her studio on the heights of Montmartre. The theater, in spite of the unlimited praise it now brought her, continued to leave her unsatisfied. For nearly a year she was given no new parts to create. The acting of the parts in her repertoire had become something of a mechanical habit, and required prac-

tically no effort. Her will to artistic activity had to find some other means of fulfilment. Sculpture, however, had ceased to be her exclusive passion. The only moderate success of her group Après la tempête had disappointed her, and she was now seized with a sudden passion for painting. Her new fancy cannot be traced to any definite origin; but for a time she was entirely absorbed by this art of which, a few weeks before, she had been quite ignorant. She knew vaguely how to draw, and possessed some rudimentary notion of color. Her friends gave her advice. Thus armed, she immediately embarked upon vast compositions. In this case, as in others, it was useless to expect Sarah Bernhardt to study; her impatience to create was too extreme. The one exception was the stage, where circumstances had constrained her to a hard apprenticeship: and in this art it took her years to arrive at mastery of her gifts.

This new "violin of Ingres" brought the actress no better results than its predecessor. Professional artists began to get tired of this troublesome creature of whims, who, out of megalomania or desire for publicity, was trespassing on everybody's preserves. Why could she not be content with her stage triumphs, which surely were resplendent enough in themselves?

The works of the new painter were not entirely successful, but attacks and discouragement only heightened the obstinate persistence of their creator. Sarah would not give in; and her attitude was sincere.

The accusation of aiming solely at advertisement was unjust. She was, perhaps, not insensible to the lively interest which her crazes aroused among the public; but her primary object was to obtain satisfaction for herself, providing what nourishment she could for her eternally unstable desires.

From time to time she was swept back into the theater. Thus, the revival of Hernani at the Comédie-Française made it necessary for her to study the rôle of Doña Sol. The performance of December 21st, 1877, was an event anticipated with interest. Hernani had not been performed for over ten years, and the last presentation had been only second-rate. Mounet-Sully, at the apogee of his talent and his force, made a marvelous Hernani, an impassioned rebel and lover. Sarah Bernhardt, the spoilt child of a public that she no longer feared, created a Doña Sol vibrant with tenderness.

The day after the première, old Hugo, his emotions stirred, wrote enthusiastically to his wonderful interpreter: "Madame, you gave us at the same time grandeur and charm. I was deeply moved, old fighter though I am; and at a certain moment, whilst the public, touched and enchanted, applauded you, I wept. This tear you drew from me is yours, and I lay it at your feet." The poet's tear was represented by a diamond drop suspended from a fine chain bracelet, an adornment which the new Doña Sol wore with great delight.

At the end of this year, 1877, even the brilliant

triumph of *Hernani* could not check the decline of Romanticism. L'Assommoir was to appear in a few months. Zola, the realist Colossus, was about to dethrone the romantic Titan. In vain the lingering disciples of Victor Hugo strove to resuscitate an outworn genre. The reign of Naturalism was at hand.

Sarah Bernhardt remained apart from the disputes of these literary schools. Phèdre yesterday, Doña Sol to-day, Mirbeau's working-girl to-morrow, she brought the same talent and glory to the service of all the changing forms of human art, and in each she illustrated the eternally renewed theme of feminine sensibility with a penetration that moved every heart.

Nevertheless, Sarah continued to be the object of quarrels and intrigues. At the theater her talent and success provoked jealousy. She was attacked on the slightest pretext: her poor health, her taste for painting or sculpture. The Exposition Universelle of 1878 furnished the occasion for a new grievance against her.

One of the principal attractions of the exhibition was the captive balloon of Pierre Giffard, a sportsman famous at a time when the word "sport" had not been incorporated into the French language. Sarah, always thirsting for new sensations, was a regular devotee of the daily ascents. One day she expressed a wish to make a flight in a free balloon. The excellent Giffard, conscious of his responsibility, hesitated; but under the insistence of the actress he finally acceded to her wish. He had a pretty little balloon equipped

specially for her, and christened it "Doña Sol" in honor of his illustrious passenger. The preparations were made in secret. Sarah had not disclosed her intentions to anyone, not even the faithful Mme. Guérard, such was her fear that people would oppose the dangerous journey she wished to attempt. Thus, on the appointed day, Sarah was able to leave the ground in undisturbed tranquillity, accompanied only by Godard and Clairin. But the balloon had hardly been in the air five minutes before the whole of Paris was aware of the famous actress's new extravagance. Perrin, at the Comédie-Française, was in a fury of indignation. Her friends and relatives lamented, alarmed for her safety. There was endless discussion as to the cause of this new "inspiration."

Meanwhile, swaying in the narrow basket, Sarah and her companions rhapsodized over the fairy-like view of Paris and enjoyed a champagne lunch. At an altitude of 8,500 feet the actress began to experience a buzzing in the ears, and to bleed at the nose. However, she did not lose her gaiety, but shook off her discomfort and the sleepiness which overcame her and took part in the manœuvers of the descent. Late at night the travelers landed in the suburbs of Paris, and a slow train brought them back to town.

Sarah, excited and tired by this escapade, went home in a bad temper, not improved by the sight of a file of carriages standing in front of her house, which had already been invaded by her relations and friends in search of news. The arrival of the young woman safe and sound smoothed the lines of consternation from their faces and called forth cries of joy, interrupted by friendly reproaches. Exhausted by her mad excursion, the actress was longing for rest. She dismissed the whole company brutally and sought renewed strength in sleep.

The next morning, Perrin sent for her; and there was yet another scene in the managerial office between the administrator and the artist. Perrin started off on his usual recriminations: Sarah was "impossible," and her eccentricities would in the end wear out the longest patience. By this ridiculous flight she had "gone beyond the limit"; and in consequence she would be fined 1,000 francs! Sarah's reply was to burst out laughing, which exasperated the administrator still more. She declared coolly that she would not pay a sou. She would prefer to resign from the company.

. . The intervention of the Minister of Fine Arts was necessary to put a stop to the dispute.

After this incident, Sarah Bernhardt's relations with the Comédie-Française became singularly strained. Perrin nourished a bitter and persistent ill will towards her. Her fellow artists found it scandalous that she could thus indulge her most audacious fancies with impunity. Her enemies made the most of this new scandal. Her friends considered that she went too far, and that her fame was becoming too much like notoriety. Sarah viewed the tumult she had created with complacency. She liked people to call her unusual, to see her as "a creature apart." She took a sly pleas-

ure in refusing to conform to conventions any more than to fashions. This, however, did not prevent her inconsistent nature from protesting at times against the accusations she had provoked and the too lively interest she excited.

Thus she decided to reply to the attacks which her latest escapade had earned her. An article in the Figaro gave her a certain opportunity, while pleading her cause. The writer of the article said in effect that the extravagances of an actress should not cause her art to be condemned. Sarah composed an "open letter" to this journalist in which she said, among other things: "I am utterly sick of being unable to do anything without being accused of 'extravagances.' I found great enjoyment in making balloon ascents. Now I no longer dare set foot in a balloon. . . . I have never flayed dogs, nor burnt cats. I do not dye my hair, and my face, far from being painted, is as pale as death. People say that I am fantastically thin, but how can I help that? I should much prefer to be 'just right.' My illnesses are very inconsiderate. The attacks strike me without warning and throw me down unconscious wherever I happen to be, whether in private or in public. I am reproached with trying to do everything: acting, sculpture and painting; but it amuses me, and I earn money at it which I spend as I please. . . . "

A little time afterwards Sarah published a book, richly illustrated by Clairin, in which her impressions during her balloon flight were reported in detail. This may be described as the actress's début as a writer. In

order to be able to grant herself a few praises without being taxed with boastfulness, she adopted an ingenious method, letting the tale be told by a chair, a dumb and motionless witness of the voyage. The public received the work favorably, and it provided the actress's devotees with a new pretext for enthusiasm. For the number of Sarah's admirers, despite the recently intensified activity of her enemies, was very considerable. She was idolized, not only by the assiduous devotees who surrounded her, but by an unnumbered, unknown crowd whom she would never meet, the most daring of whom signified their existence by a bunch of flowers or a billet doux. She received such a number of these adoring epistles every day that she had ceased to pay any attention to them; she could hardly take the trouble to look through them, hastily, with a faint, blasé smile. Sometimes, however, amid the joyous intoxication of the loves she inspired, a moving or even a tragic note was struck. A Civil Servant named Benâtre besieged her for a long time with letters and telegrams containing impassioned declarations. For whole days he hung about near her house. Sarah had entirely turned the unfortunate man's head, which cannot have been very sound, for at the end of a few months he was put in an asylum at Ville-Evrard.

In spite of the advice of doctors and the prudent remonstrances of her friends, Sarah continued to lead an exhausting and diversified life. She worked spasmodically at sculpture. Her works, without offering any real interest, were no longer uniformly bad. Consequently she was accused of employing "jackals." Her bad health was made even worse by this régime, and the actress was once more haunted by the idea of death. She foresaw, not without melancholy, an early end. "My illness makes me a little sad," she confessed in a letter to Perrin, "and I do not know whether I shall see the end of the year which is now beginning." She had just been allotted a new part to create in Amphitryon. Ill health forced her to stop rehearsing, and soon she left for the Côte d'Azur.

On her return, in the following February, she played Monime in Mithridate, her last great part before leaving the Comédie-Française. It was with reference to her rendering of this part that Sarcey wrote: "One should not praise her for knowing how to speak verse, for she is the Muse, she is poetry itself. Intelligence and art have no part here; she is moved by a secret instinct. She recites verse as the nightingale sings, as the wind sighs, as the water murmurs, or as Lamartine once wrote it."

The years had deepened the talent of Sarah Bernhardt. The dualism of her two existences was to a large extent resolved. She had arrived at the supreme phase when an actress can remain an artist in her private life, and continue to be a woman in her artistic life. She was in the plenitude of her beauty, and her talent had reached its maturity. The originality which had distinguished her so sharply from other actresses had become only more marked. She remained still the same

impenetrable, inaccessible, disconcerting creature, something in the style of the heroine of a legend, draped in white and mystery.

During the winter she loved to rest before the blaze in her tall fireplace, curled up on the skins of wild beasts. The flames sent fiery lights over her transparent face. Even in these hours of idleness there was a strangeness about her. At her receptions she was more approachable, almost social in manner, but never did she depart from her air of impenetrability. Beneath the brilliant chandeliers of her great salon she moved, slow and majestic. With her Madonna-like profile, slightly modified by her Jewish origin, her tawny hair, her small teeth between the narrow carmine of her lips, she was more than beautiful. When she smiled, her eyes were magnetic. Her repartees were dazzling in their unexpectedness. She bewitched everyone by the strange, disquieting inflections of her muted voice.

Since establishing herself in the Avenue de Villiers, she had once more been giving sensational soirées, at which the whole of cosmopolitan high Society rubbed shoulders. The royalties and celebrities who attended the Exposition Universelle of 1878 made it a point of honor to visit her. Her fame conferred on her the position of the "great attraction" of the French capital, and everybody became only more anxious to be presented to her as she became more difficult of access. She admitted only a very select society. Had she not royal friends, such as the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII? During his stay in Paris, the Comédie-

Française devised the gesture of offering the prince a magnificent album which each of the actors and actresses of the company had adorned with some reflection, some fanciful or paradoxical sentence. Sarah inscribed the following curious maxim: "The intelligent person makes egoism a virtue; the fool makes it a vice."

But her fame and her princely acquaintances did not fulfil the insatiable longing for the absolute by which she was haunted. Paris now seemed to her too old a conquest, emptied of its appeal. Foreign lands attracted her, with the unforeseen incidents of travel and the revelation of unknown peoples. It was not long before an opportunity presented itself for her to begin an era of peregrinations beyond the frontiers of France.



SARAH BERNHARDT by Gill 1878

~ XVI ~

In the spring of 1879 the Comedie-Française was preparing for a tour in England in the near future; the committee had, indeed, signed a contract with the Gaiety Theatre for the summer season.

In the rôle of the Queen in Ruy Blas, with Mounet-Sully as her partner, the actress had just achieved a success on the stage of the Théâtre Français equal to that which had greeted her creation of the part at the Odéon, long before. Now, however, the most brilliant triumph could not move Sarah. Hardly was the young woman off the stage before she hastened to her studio on the Boulevard de Clichy.

It was in this supreme refuge, one afternoon, that the impresario Jarrett, having forced his way in — for she had decided to receive nobody — surprised her. He first proposed a tour in America. Sarah refused. Then the Englishman explained to the actress how, if she would entrust the arrangements to him, she could easily make a small fortune during her visit to England by performing in London drawing-rooms; Sarah accepted this new offer at once. Deliberately she signed the contract which the impresario laid before her.

Jarrett, without losing any time, immediately commenced a discreet advertising campaign. Through the medium of the newspapers, he announced to the English public that Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt would be willing, during her stay in London, to give performances at private parties.

The effect of this was electric. Perrin, on reading the announcement, reproduced in The Times, was thunderstruck. The news, which the Paris Press hastened to spread abroad, provoked a serious scandal. The proposal was regarded as a grave blow to Art. This rigorous epoch judged it scandalous that the actors of the first National Theater should thus hire themselves out to amuse the leisure hours of British financiers. The name of tradition was invoked, and the critics hurled themselves into the most violent attacks against Sarah. Like acrimonious wives, who, at the slightest grievance, recite to their husbands the same eternal rosary of identical lamentations, they brought out yet again the old overworked reproaches they had used a hundred times before. Some went so far as to deplore that the Comédie-Française should have engaged this eccentric who, not content with being a perpetual object of scandal within the walls of the city, found a means, at her first contact with the outer world, of ruining the prestige of French art abroad. The committee of the Comédie-Française hastily met to deliberate; and the members agreed unanimously that it was important to put a stop to this agitation as quickly as possible. In execution of this decision, the daily papers received next day a note. which they were requested to insert, informing the

public that all artists of the Théâtre Français were free to employ their leisure hours as they might think fit. Sarah's action was secretly approved by the other members of the company, happy to be able in future to realize a few slight but remunerative "extras" outside the theater itself.

The attacks against the actress ceased immediately. Sarah, however, had been deeply wounded by them, and was bitterly resentful. She was dissatisfied with the world and with life. She seemed to take pleasure in dwelling on the causes of her discontent. Her theatrical fame seemed to her more than ever a vain thing. Her passion for the fine arts resolved itself into much time and labor lost for meager results. As for love—well, one grew tired of it like everything else. In the glare of the footlights, Mounet-Sully and Sarah were still the same passionate lovers, but in private their sentiments had cooled considerably. What was left, then, for Sarah, except the fierce pleasure of fighting on, no matter what the object, in the hope that the fight at least might not be utterly vain? . . .

The boat which bore off the company from the Comédie-Française left the shore to the accompaniment of cheers, kisses thrown indiscriminately, and an indefatigable waving of handkerchiefs. But its arrival at Folkestone was greeted with even greater enthusiasm. Several thousand people were waiting, massed on the quay. The company landed amid frantic acclamations. A tall young man, uttering hurrahs in honor of

Sarah Bernhardt, attracted attention by the exuberance of his admiration. It was Oscar Wilde. Among the cries that greeted the company, the name of Sarah Bernhardt returned continuously as a *leit-motif*. In spite of the evident pleasure this gave her, the actress was nevertheless somewhat embarrassed at first by the presence of her less favored fellow artists.

After this warm salutation by a race generally supposed to be stolid and phlegmatic, the arrival in London, where Sarah was counting on an even more remarkable reception, and where she passed entirely unnoticed, hurt the actress's vanity a little. As she drove through the gloomy, indifferent capital, sitting sullenly in a corner of her cab, a sense of anxiety and distress invaded her which she was unable to repress. In spite of the flowers sent two days before by her Parisian friends, which now adorned the rooms she passed through, the private house where she was to stay for six weeks seemed, at this first contact, cold and hostile. It was with a heavy heart, and very tired, that she fell asleep a few hours later.

Next morning she was hardly out of bed before she must receive the representatives of the Press. There were no less than thirty-seven of them, and she had to grant a private interview to each one; such was Jarrett's will. Then followed the interminable succession of visits. Submerged by the flood of people anxious to monopolize her, she coped with her new obligations as best she could — which was not very well. The chief difficulty was to select the right invitations to accept,

among the many she received. Sometimes, without even an apology, she failed to keep important appointments, and annoyed many people in consequence. But was it her fault? She had promised, certainly, but when the time came she felt weary, and longed for solitude.

Now, for the first time, Sarah prepared to face a foreign audience. With this public, the literary artifices of the author whose thought she was interpreting would no longer count. She knew that she must draw on her own resources for all that could arouse emotion and enthusiasm in beings sensible only to her gesture and her cry. It was, indeed, a special form of the histrionic art, with particular laws of its own, which by the force of circumstances was about to be imposed upon her.

On the evening of her first appearance on the London stage she was suddenly overcome by stage fright. She was to play *Phèdre*, and she persuaded herself that she had forgotten her part. She could not find her costume. Panic reigned. She knew that she was the chosen one, the great favorite of the public; that was why she feared so much to disappoint them. Amid the applause which greeted her entrance on the stage, she pitched her voice, unfortunately, a few tones too high. Having once started in this key, it was impossible for her to lower it. Poor Sarah was condemned for the whole of the performance to an effort which exhausted her. Her genuine physical suffering gave her voice the true note of pain. Her cries, her pleas and threats were uttered with a harsh poignancy which gripped the

audience. When the curtain fell, the audience rose to their feet and made her a magnificent ovation, while the unfortunate actress collapsed, exhausted, in one corner of the stage.

This first contact with the English public was decisive, but it nearly cost Sarah her life. All night she was shaken by fearful attacks of coughing up blood.

The personality of Sarah Bernhardt was the rage of London during the season of 1879. The Comédie-Française company had a full house at the Gaiety every night, and Sarah was definitely installed as the grand favorite. She gave an exhibition of her sculptures and paintings in Piccadilly, having brought a few specimens with her on Tarrett's advice. The private view was an event for the elegant Society of London. All the leading personages of the Court, led by the Prince of Wales, made a point of attending it. In reality, if the acclamations of the British public were legitimate at the theater, their craze for the actress's pictorial works did little credit to their good taste. But the snobbery of fashion, incapable of fine distinctions, had prepared their minds to bestow the same admiration on everything which emanated from the star of the moment. Sarah, vain though she was, possessed a clearer notion of her own value. She attached no great importance to this exhibition, but admitted frankly that she had burdened herself with her works in the sole aim of making a financial profit. She counted on the vanity of the multitude, which in general cares little for the intrinsic value of the productions it buys, provided they bear the signature of some celebrity; and she was right in her calculations.

Soon she was enabled to realize her latest caprice. For, at the moment when she conquered the affections of a people, Sarah was preoccupied only with the desire to add two lion-cubs to her menagerie. This detail admirably illustrates the character of the unusual creature that was Sarah Bernhardt. For her, a caprice had the force of law. She knew only one means of destroying her desires: by satisfying them. The powerful will and strong character of this woman could vanquish weakness, overcome the worst obstacles; how many times had it striven against adversity! But never did she learn the art of resisting the irrational whims which unexpectedly took possession of her mind, and always she placed at their service her active energy and her patient tenacity.

Profiting by two free days, she betook herself, without telling anybody, to Liverpool. In that city there existed a famous menagerie, the Cross Zoo. Unfortunately, the lions in the Cross Zoo were no longer cubs. Sarah had perforce to content herself with a young cheetah and a white wolf-dog with flaming eyes and sharp pointed teeth of terrifying aspect. The proprietor of the menagerie, anxious to please such a celebrated client, made her a present of six chameleons.

Escorted by her cumbersome acquisitions, our eccentric made a sensational return to London. The garden of her London residence already contained several members of her Paris menagerie from which she

had refused to be separated, and the arrival of the new guests did not fail to cause general perturbation among them. The peaceful neighborhood of Chester Square was much disturbed. The echo of what was described as a "witches' Sabbath" spread through London. The newspapers gave so much publicity to the matter that the management of the Comédie-Française, alarmed, finally requested Sarah to conduct herself henceforth with more discretion, lest her extravagances should bring discredit on the first National Theater of France. The actress, who had at first enjoyed the adventure thoroughly, was irritated to a degree by this call to order. She was tired of being criticized in everything, blamed for everything, in London as in Paris. She determined to reply to these calumnies and attack her adversaries in her turn. She became firmer in her determination not to give way; for the affair of the animals was by now grossly exaggerated. It reached gigantic proportions and served as a pretext for the revival, both in Paris and in London, of all the scandalous rumors that had ever been attached to the actress's name since the beginning of her career.

By a final stroke of ill luck, Sarah was obliged, one afternoon, to excuse herself from the performance for an excellent reason: she was ill. The play that was to be given before the Londoners was L'Etrangère, by the younger Dumas. For lack of a substitute, the program was changed at the last moment and Tartuffe was performed. Annoyed at the alteration, the majority of the audience demanded their money back,



SARAH BERNHARDT from a picture by Bastien-Lepage 1879

and the final receipts were pitiful. Then there arose an unprecedented tumult on both sides of the Channel. The hue and cry was soon general; the offensive against Sarah was pursued on all sides. "Francisque Sarcey," wrote Sarah Bernhardt in her Mémoires, "transformed into a drum-major, set the pace of the attack, wielding his terrible pen." This critic was truly merciless towards her this time:

"A second incident of this kind would be more than enough to alienate the sympathy of the English public from the Comédie-Française. Persons who, out of caprice or affectation, or, it may be, through a miscalculation of the amount of energy at their disposal, throw the theater and the company into such embarrassments, these persons are extremely blameworthy, and they may be sure that the day will come when they will have to pay the penalty for their behavior. Spoiled children are amusing until the moment when some friend of the family asks what time they are put to bed. . . ."

In vain did Sarah defend herself; she was not believed. "I was very ill on Saturday," she wrote to the editor of the *Daily Telegraph*. "Unkind doubts have been expressed on this point, but I did the impossible in playing that evening, and it was only by sheer willpower that I succeeded in finishing the performance. I had no interest in not playing at the matinée; it would have been pure foolishness, therefore, and I assure you, sir, that I am not a fool."

But it is difficult to check spiteful tongues, once

they have begun to wag. The worst kind of nonsense continued to be retailed on the subject of the actress. It was alleged that for the price of a shilling she would show herself to all comers dressed as a man; that she used to stand leaning over her balcony smoking big cigars; that she practised fencing in her garden disguised as a white pierrot; that she took boxing-lessons and had broken two of her instructor's teeth — and a number of other puerilities of the same caliber. The public, which adores gossip, accepted these stories confidently and even amplified them.

Deciding to "strike a big blow," Sarah telegraphed a long reply to the Figaro, which had published an article by Albert Wolff relating these follies. Before the growing menace of the scandal, she had taken fright. She attached little value to her position at the Comédie-Française, but if it were necessary to leave, she wished to quit the "Maison de Molière" of her own accord. Fear of being dismissed made her take the initiative. She made the following declaration:

"I give you my word of honor that I have never dressed myself as a man since I have been in London. I have not even brought my sculptor's costume with me. I make the most categorical denial of this allegation. I have attended the little exhibition I held, once only; and that was on the day when I had given only a few private invitations for the opening. Nobody, therefore, paid a shilling to see me. It is true that I act in private houses. But I am, as you know, one of the lowest-paid members of the Comédie-Française. I am

surely entitled to make up the difference to some extent. It is true, again, that I am exhibiting ten pictures and eight pieces of sculpture. But since I brought them to sell, it is obviously necessary that I should show them. . . . Now, if the nonsense which is talked about me has wearied the Parisians and they have decided to give me a bad reception on my return, I do not wish to force anybody to behave meanly. I tender my resignation to the Comédie-Française. If the London public is tired of all this agitation and intends to transform its good will into ill will, I would ask the management of the Comédie to let me leave England, to spare them the distress of seeing one of their members hissed and hooted."

This long speech for the defense excited much comment. In spite of all the calls to order which they had thought fit to address to her, the Comédie-Française did not at all desire the departure of their sociétaire, for the excellent reason that they knew she could not be replaced. Who could give performances equal to hers in Hernani, Ruy Blas, L'Etrangère or Phèdre? When the famous letter was published, the members of the company came one after the other to lecture their fellow artist. As for Perrin, he sent her a letter on the spot inviting her to reconsider her decision. This gesture on the part of the administration was certainly influenced by a recent article by Zola, in which the great novelist, after paying homage to Sarah's talent, defended her against the attacks of which she was the object: "She is reproached, above all, for not

having kept exclusively to the dramatic art, for having turned to sculpture, painting and what not. This is positively funny. Not content with finding her too thin and declaring her to be mad, they would like to regulate the employment of her days. Really, there is much more freedom in prison. Actually, people do not deny her the right to practise sculpture or painting; they only declare that she ought not to exhibit her work. Here the complaint reaches the height of comedy. Why not pass a law at once to forbid the accumulation of talents? Note that the sculpture of Madame Sarah Bernhardt has been considered so personal that she has been accused of signing works of which she was not the author." Unfortunately for Sarah, the just arguments of the famous novelist were lost in the torrent of ineptitudes.

Sarah Bernhardt allowed herself to be persuaded not to leave the "Maison de Molière." The season in London finished fairly well for her, though not in the apotheosis which at one moment she had hoped for. But her return to Paris took place almost secretly. Perrin, hastening to her immediately on her arrival, counseled her not to appear at the theater for the ceremonial coronation of Molière which traditionally inaugurated the theatrical season every year. At the same time, an anonymous letter offered her similar advice:

"My DEAR SKELETON, — You would do well not to show your horrible Jewish nose at the ceremony the day after to-morrow. I am afraid it might serve as a target for all the apples that are at this moment being cooked for you in the fair city of Paris. Tell the papers you have been spitting blood, and stay in bed, reflecting on the consequences of publicity carried too far."

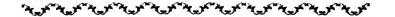
Publicity! No doubt poor Sarah had sometimes made sacrifices to it in the course of her long career. But she was sick of these continual reproaches; the painful memory of them pursued her all her life. When she came to write her Mémoires, the actress still felt indignant at this accusation. She compares publicity to an octopus, of which, she says, she was many a time the victim, without having ever provoked it. And there is no doubt that on many occasions she would have preferred to have less attention focused on her, rather than to be surrounded by the equivocal celebrity which was too often hers.

For the moment, in spite of all warnings—or, rather, just because of them—Sarah determined to "face the music." The custom was for the artists to pass across the stage two by two, each carrying a garland destined for the bust of Molière. Before a crowded auditorium, Sarah determined to present herself alone, so that she alone might bear the effect of the cabal. "When my turn came," she relates, "I advanced alone. I felt pale and full of conquering will. I advanced slowly towards the footlights, and, instead of bowing like the others, I remained upright, returning the gaze

of all the eyes converging on me. I had been told to expect battle; I did not wish to provoke it, but I would not run away from it. I waited a second; I felt the audience quivering, intoxicated; then suddenly, uplifted by an impulse of generous tenderness, they burst into a fanfare of shouts and cheers. . . . It was certainly one of the finest triumphs of my career."

This unhoped-for victory profoundly moved the actress, though without entirely reconciling her with the dramatic career. A star of the first theater in the world, strong enough to intimidate her enemies by her mere presence, Sarah nevertheless gave way more readily to bitterness than to the exaltation of triumph. Once more she underwent a crisis of intense lassitude and discouragement. Her whole past sickened her with a stale after-taste of mediocrity. She must, absolutely must, find "something different." Something different from the stage, sculpture, painting. . . . Why was she not a man? Who knows if Sarah Bernhardt ever aspired to lead armies or rule nations? Did she, perhaps, imagine herself, like another Joan of Arc, deflecting the course of history by her will?

Thus, at thirty-five, once more irresolute and at a loss, the actress questioned her destiny.



~ XVII ~

The rest of the year passed uneventfully for Sarah. Her position at the Comédie-Française, however, became more and more difficult and painful. She was slighted on every pretext; people went out of their way to humiliate her. She for her part was irritable, and her uncertain health helped to make her sulky and odious to her fellow artists. Everything went from bad to worse. At the first opportunity, events precipitated themselves into a crisis. Perrin decided to give the actress the part of Clorinde in L'Aventurière, by Emile Augier. Sarah was displeased. She did not like either the play or the author, a bald sexagenarian who inspired her with an unreasoning repulsion. In her estimation his verses were detestable, and the character she was to interpret was insipid. She rehearsed negligently, lifelessly and without interest. She was not good at dissimulating her sentiments, and one day a remark of Augier's made her burst out. "What do you expect me to do?" she exclaimed. "I know I'm bad, but not as bad as your lines!"

Anxious, nevertheless, to avoid an utter failure, she asked Perrin to postpone the first night for a week; her ill health had not allowed her to make any sustained effort and she was afraid of not being ready; in

a few days she would have recovered and would be able to study her rôle better. But the administrator refused; he had made a resolution to "tame" the actress and was not prepared to give way to what he called "another whim." In any case, no postponement was now possible, for the first night had been announced and the seats were sold.

It happened as might have been foreseen. On April 17th the première of L'Aventurière revealed itself as the most glaring failure of Sarah Bernhardt's career. The actress gave an extremely bad performance—much worse than she herself may have supposed. Everything conspired against her—her costume, which was not a success; her voice, made hoarse by the after affects of a cold; lastly and above all, her distaste for the play, which did not give her the necessary energy to surmount the weakness which invaded her as early as the first act.

The Press next day was not indulgent towards this lamentable effort. Sarcey, suspecting some abnormal cause for the failure, was inclined to moderation; he was one of the few journalists who did not utterly crush the actress. But he confessed that he was disconcerted: "What worries me is her method of approaching the part. It would be difficult to know exactly what she meant to make of the character. She gave no clear outline to her Clorinde." The other critics were less circumspect. They ignored such subtle discriminations, and quite simply took advantage of the occasion to "flay" the actress. Garaguel wrote in

the Journal des Débats: "The mere sight of Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt's eccentric costume clearly showed her imperfect understanding of her part. Her gestures and carriage generally were lacking in distinction. . . . In the transports of the last act she was really appalling; she had no strength, and nothing could be heard but raucous, strangled sounds. . . ." Some were even more acrimonious, Vitu for instance, who in the Figaro reproached the actress for the "vulgarity of her gestures." It was impossible to offend the aristocratic Sarah Bernhardt more cruelly—or, indeed, more unjustly.

Before the new tide of hostility which was rising, Sarah recoiled. She had left the theater in tears, and had spent the whole night in endless inward discussions. What line should she take? Next morning she was still preyed on by uncertainty. But the idea of a violent rupture with the Comédie-Française was growing more definite in her mind. In a recrudescence of anger, she said to herself that she had evaded the issue too long. She must act at once and provoke an irreparable breach, so as to prevent the possibility of changing her mind and render useless the influence which would otherwise be exercised on her behalf. Sarah Bernhardt, in such complex situations, was capable only of sweeping measures. She acted abruptly and violently. Thus, once before, she had shattered her connection with the Gymnase. Thus, to-day, she must break with the "Maison de Molière." To hand in her resignation was not enough. To make this resignation final and beyond repeal, she must so arrange that the committee should be unable to discuss it. They must learn the news only when it was too late to recapture their sociétaire—that is, when the publicity of the Press had already changed it into an accomplished fact. Sarah composed a letter to Perrin.

"Monsieur L'Administrateur, — You forced me to play when I was not ready. . . . What I foresaw has come to pass. The result of the performance has exceeded my expectations. . . . This is my first failure at the Comédie, and it shall be the last. I warned you on the day of the dress-rehearsal, and you ignored my warning. I keep my word. When you receive this letter, I shall have left Paris. Be so kind, Monsieur l'Administrateur, as to accept my immediate resignation, and believe me, yours faithfully . . ."

Of this letter the actress took two copies, which she sent by hand at once, one to the offices of the Gaulois, the other to those of the Figaro, whilst the original, intended for Perrin, was simply put in the letter-box. In this way, the administrator did not receive the missive until after he had learned its contents from reading the two newspapers.

Fifteen years before, Sarah Bernhardt's flight to Spain had caused, even then, a certain sensation. At that time she was only a little actress, celebrated chiefly for a former scandal attached to her name. Her youth served as some excuse. But it was impossible to ascribe to youthful folly the gesture of the star of thirty-six, universally famous, who already had a triumphal past behind her. In consequence, the actress's decision aroused considerable echoes, and soon even acquired the importance of a small coup d'état.

At first, the Comédie-Française was completely upside down. The management had hastily to withdraw the announcements of L'Aventurière until Croizette should have learned the part. A messenger was despatched post haste to the deserter's house in the Avenue de Villiers. Sarah, however, had already disappeared. There was talk of sending out in search of her. The most improbable clues as to her whereabouts had been brought forward, when a telegram arrived from Le Havre: the actress was there, very ill in consequence of a feverish chill caught on her arrival at the Cap de la Hève.

She had left for Le Havre in the hope of taking a rest cure and in the desire to preserve her incognito. But how was it possible for the illustrious Sarah Bernhardt to hide herself? The very day after her arrival, she had been recognized; at once the reporters assailed her, and they now announced to the whole world the place of her retreat.

In the artistic and literary circles of Paris, the excitement continued. Sarah had her partizans as well as her adversaries. She was the pretext for a battle of pens which entertained the public greatly. Acrimonious words were succeeded by invective. Emile Augier

had indited a long letter to Perrin in which he elaborated the reasons which, in his view, had given rise to the event: "The reviewers have allowed themselves to indulge in certain critical observations, and Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt does not like it. Who is to blame? These gentlemen of the Press, who have hitherto treated her as a spoiled child." Garaguel, at this slur on the name of his corporation, retorted with a thundering paragraph. Certainly, dramatic critics have broad backs. But let the authors not forget to make their own confession. "Were they not the first to fall at the actress's feet, vying with each other in adoration?" By lavishing their eulogies on her who, they said, "gave life to their works," had not they, more than anyone, contributed to exaggerate her reputation? "Who is to blame? Why, nobody and everybody! French gallantry requires us to confer on theatrical women praises which are often extravagant; every actress should be able to assess the real value of the terms used; only fools make mistakes in their estimation."

Once discovered, the actress—forgiven by the public, who were enchanted by her skill in setting others at variance—did not think it necessary to prolong her exile further. She returned to Paris, relieved and satisfied by her rupture with the Comédie-Française. Really, she had stifled in that rigid administrative framework! The gilded semi-slavery in which she had been kept was too repugnant to her rebellious nature. And if she had won many laurels on that illustrious

stage, how many troubles and disappointments had she not experienced also? On the whole, her talent had aroused more jealousy than it had met with encouragement. Some operations are painful but necessary: Sarah realized more and more that her rupture with the Comédie was of this order. She saw it as a liberation. There was also mingled with this sentiment a malicious joy at having given a jolt to accepted principles and played a trick on her ex-masters. What matter that Sarcey repeated: "The time comes when troublesome children must be put to bed," or that the irritated Vitu fulminated: "And now we have had enough, really, enough talk about Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt! " Sarah knew perfectly that it was not she who had been sent to bed in this affair, and that with all respect to the pontiff of the Figaro, there would be more talk about her yet. At thirty-six, she might well take pride in the richness of her career!

Nevertheless, one care darkened her genuine satisfaction, when she ruminated on the fiasco of L'Aventurière. However much the part may have bored her, she had expected to be able to make something of it, all the same. Well, she had made nothing at all of it. Did this mean that she was finished? — that this failure, followed by her departure from the "Maison de Molière," had finally shattered her theatrical career? It is permissible to suppose that the actress was haunted by this thought. Did she not make this surprising declaration on the morrow of her resignation? "It is over. I have learned sculpture and painting. I sell

30,000 francs' worth a year. I shall practise painting and sculpture. The brush and the boasting-tool . . . these will give me a second life, far more tranquil and more profitable than the first."

More profitable? Perhaps! But more tranquil! By what aberration did Sarah Bernhardt speak of tranquillity? Never in all her life would she make up her mind to an existence of calm and quiet. To explain the actress's monetary aspirations to a life without incident or display, one must consider the bad state of her health at the time. She was in the midst of a period of moral and physical depression. She exclaimed: "In twenty years, shall I be of this world? I have always before me the specter of the young woman who grows old behind the footlights, and I do not wish to grow old there."

But these moments of discouragement were fleeting. Sarah possessed a heroic nature, an admirable resiliency which never allowed her lassitude to continue long.

A few days after the artist's resignation, Jarrett, the impresario, called on her and renewed his offer of a tour in America. The terms he proposed to the actress were tempting enough to claim her consideration. They included fees of 5,000 francs, an honorable percentage of the takings, generous hotel expenses and a special Pullman, fitted to her own taste, for her traveling. Sarah listened attentively to the manager's words; then she signed. Jarrett had come along at the opportune moment. Ashamed of her momentary weakness, Sarah recovered all her vigor in an instant.

The attraction of the struggle to be waged finally restored her animation. What a marvelous opportunity for revenge this offered her! She planned to regain the ground she had lost. . . .

The tour was to begin in October; the actress had thus more than five months before her. She had plenty of time to betake herself to London, whither she was invited by the impresarios of the Comédie-Française, Hollingshead and Mayer. From mid-May to mid-June she had a wonderfully successful season in England.

One consequence of this triumph outside the Comédie-Française was to incense the committee of that theater, the Press and the public against Sarah. This was the moment when the lawsuit begun by the "Maison de Molière," claiming 300,000 francs' damages from their former member, was before the courts. The figure named was more eloquent than any adjective in the homage it rendered to the value of the actress.

This action naturally counted among the most "Parisian" events of the hour. Maître Allou, counsel for the Comédie and one of the masters of his profession, opened the prosecution with a pitiless speech. After sketching in broad lines all the scandals which had marked her career, he read Sarah's letters to Perrin. Oh, those letters! They made up a formidable dossier in Maître Allou's hands. Furious little notes alternated with long pages filled with interminable effusions of affection. The fantastically variable character of the young artist, with her caprices and her

childish reversals of temper, stood revealed in this correspondence. After his reading, Maître Allou had only to venture a few excursions into the private life of the accused in order to convince his audience. The public, always eager for the public washing of dirty linen, was satisfied. Once having adroitly thrown discredit upon the woman, the barrister turned his fire upon the actress, the functionary who had failed in her obligations. The peroration was a veritable funeral oration on poor Sarah Bernhardt:

"Her punishment will be, no doubt, a progressive decline of the talent of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt in passing through the risks she will run. Is it not clear that, by leaving this sympathetic milieu... she will lose a part of her worth? Is it possible to transport that to America, like an exotic merchandise? She will not be understood. Her subtle effects, her refined art, will not be distinguished by a foreign public from those of common performers. And what will the fugitive feel when she hears from afar resounding acclamations in praise of rising stars, whose glory may so soon be equal to her own?"

Sarah Bernhardt had entrusted her defense to Maître Barboux, who, if the task he undertook was a difficult one, certainly showed himself unworthy of it. Somewhat embarrassed in his pleading, he first had recourse to rhetorical tirades and literary pretensions.

"It is no longer the woman, it is the actress who awakes," he explained. "But still herself, with her sudden resolutions, her feverish impatiences, her variations, more abrupt than those of the most disturbed

atmosphere. Capricious and fanciful, classical and romantic at the same time, like those fantastic and charming creatures with which the imagination of Shakespeare has peopled A Midsummer Night's Dream or The Tempest." Then, perceiving that his periods, which he considered moving, were met with indifference, the barrister implored pity for his client: "If she left the Comédie, it was because she had abused her own strength. She was ill. Her art was killing her. Why demand damages from a dying woman? Do you not feel the element of fragility even in her successes? Can you not believe that these strings, through having vibrated too strongly and too often, are now perhaps much weakened? Will you not see the terrible rapidity with which this rash woman is unraveling the pallid skein of her life?"

Despite these clumsy attempts at pathos, the case was lost for Sarah Bernhardt. She, however, the "dying woman," was scoring a fresh triumph every night on the London stage. Little did she care for the pleadings or the judgment. She must pay 100,000 francs' damages? Certainly! She could earn twice that amount in a month. It was not too high a price for independence. Convicted, yes, but so happy to be free! Henceforth the choice of her rôles would no more depend on the good pleasure of Monsieur Perrin. Her future would be no longer limited to the narrow stage of the Comédie-Française.

Sarah Bernhardt's glance embraced the whole world, which now lay open before her. She felt within her the appetite and the courage for unbounded conquests.

PART II

"I have widened the bounds of glory."

Napoleon

~ XVIII ~

FREED FROM HER BONDS, SARAH could now work on her own account. She scored triumphant successes in London with the eight plays which were to form her repertoire in the United States. Always she was acclaimed, and bouquets succeeded bouquets. The sympathy of the English public held firm, and prevented it from lingering over the malicious stories about the actress which were hawked round Paris at the time of her lawsuit.

Great was Sarah's amazement when she heard one day that the principal dramatic critics of Paris had just arrived in London in order to follow her performances. Sarcey, who shortly before had talked of "sending the spoiled child to bed"; the irascible Vitu; Lapomeraye; and others who had vituperated against her — they had all come. Did they hope to see the actress hissed? Surely not; in this case their disappointment would be complete, for London now adored Sarah as Paris had adored her on her good days. When the actress created the title-part in Adrienne Lecouvreur, by Eugéne Scribe, the fever of enthusiasm reached a paroxysm. The critics present in the auditorium could not deny that the actress displayed a kind of genius in this rôle. Sarcey dedicated an article of several columns to her in the Temps:

"Nothing, nothing at the Comédie-Française will ever replace for us this last act of Adrienne Lecouv-reur. Ah! how much better she would have done to remain at the Comédie. Yes, I have come back to my old refrain — I cannot resist it!"

Here already were indirect advances, to which Sarah paid very little attention. Then it was Vitu's turn to exclaim: "She acted . . . not only with immense talent, but also with a sense of composition which she had never revealed before."

Had the critic already forgotten how he wrote, hardly a month earlier:

"And now we have had enough, really, enough talk about Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt. Let her take her monotonous voice and her macaber fancies abroad. As far as we are concerned, she can teach us nothing new about her talent. . . ."

This volte-face did not fail to amuse Sarah prodigiously. Willy-nilly, they were all coming back to her, these peevish reviewers! It had become impossible not to bow down before her talent. Even the Comédie-Française, after having brought against her an action which had received such immense publicity, could not hold out; and she was discreetly informed that the Comédie was prepared to take her back. Perrin took the trouble to send a tiresome envoy who urged her to reenter the "Maison de Molière": she would be allowed to complete her tour in America, and on her return her reintegration would seem perfectly natural. The ambassador, however, went quite the wrong way

to work in persuading the actress: he told her that she would be only too happy, after her transatlantic trip, that the Comédie should consent to receive her once more. This was precisely what should not have been said. Sarah deliberately sent Perrin's messenger about his business.

In any case, she had other plans in mind. Since the creation in London of her two new parts, Adrienne Lecouvreur and Froufrou, hardly a day passed without her receiving offers of tours here, there and everywhere. Contract after contract was presented to her, and she was left stunned by so much glory and so much money. But the fact of her recent independence had awakened in her an astonishing increase of energy and activity. She decided, therefore, before her departure for America, to take her two latest creations to Belgium and Denmark, where she had been invited. Her entourage advised her to rest, but the actress would not listen; never had she felt so much courage, so much vigor at her disposal. Besides, the material terms proposed were too attractive not to appeal to her strongly; her monetary needs were increasing and became more and more imperious. Almost immediately after her return to Paris, she set out again in the direction of Brussels.

Belgium was almost France; the same language, the same customs, the same fashions, the same applause at the theaters! It was a different matter at Copenhagen, where she landed a short time afterwards.

Her arrival in the city necessitated special police

to keep order, so dense was the crowd gathered at the station to greet her. Her carriage drove slowly between two solid walls of spectators, reenforced by a cordon of police. That same evening, Sarah played Adrienne Lecouvreur, and the very next morning the Figaro published an enthusiastic notice.

"Sarah Bernhardt has just acted Adrienne Lecouvreur with immense success before a magnificent audience. The royal family, the King and Queen of Greece and the Princess of Wales were present at the performance. The Queens threw their bouquets to the French actress in the midst of acclamations. It is a triumph without precedent. The public is delirious with excitement."

A satirical paper hastened to point out that these eulogies were not to be considered as serious, since Garaguel, in the name of all dramatic critics, had said not so long ago that one should not take the compliments which he and his *confrères* showered upon actresses too literally! This gibe did not fail to amuse the literary circles of Paris and to call forth more discussions about Sarah Bernhardt.

The latter's stay in Copenhagen opened delightfully. The King showed himself anxious to fulfil her wishes before she could express them. Did the actress wish to visit Hamlet's tomb? He placed a boat at her disposal which conveyed her to Elsinor. The return journey was accompanied by the lament of Nordic melopæias, whilst a discreet sailing boat scattered roses before the ship which carried Sarah Bernhardt. Moved by the

poetry of this moment, Sarah kept ever afterwards an exquisite memory of Denmark. Never before, outside France, had she been fêted with such ardor. At her second performance, the King summoned her to his box and there, in the presence of the Queens, conferred on her the Danish Order of Merit.

The end of this enchanting visit was marred by an unexpected incident. On the eve of her departure a big supper-party was given in honor of the actress. At the end of this supper the celebrities of Denmark and representatives of the foreign powers drank a solemn toast. When his turn came, Baron Magnus, the Prussian Minister, raised his glass "to the health of France, which brings forth such great artists."

Hardly ten years had passed since the Franco-Prussian War, and the rancor of the vanquished was not dead. No doubt the baron's phrase was somewhat ill-chosen, but he was far too well bred to have committed this gaffe with intention. Nevertheless, Sarah Bernhardt, who was an uncompromising chauvinist at this epoch, and overstrung at that moment, rose, vibrant and dramatic: "So be it, let us drink to France—but to France in her entirety, Monsieur le ministre de Prusse!" Upon these words, the orchestra struck up the Marseillaise. An indescribable embarrassment took possession of the assembly, and the hall was deserted by everyone with all possible haste.

Sarah Bernhardt went home precipitately, realizing that she had gone a little too far. Her undeserved and untimely outburst might have unfortunate diplomatic consequences. She realized that she had just placed Baron Magnus, a delightful man, in an awkward position with regard to his Government; and Prince Bismarck had the reputation of not taking such things lightly. . . . A messenger came from the French Legation that same night, requesting Sarah to write a letter to the Minister to explain her words. But the terms of the hastily prepared draft appeared inacceptable to the actress, and she evaded the issue. Diplomatic circles hushed up the affair as best they could.

The next day the actress left Copenhagen, saluted by the ovations of the inhabitants, while French flags flapped in the wind. The Danes had little affection for Germany, and this famous French artist served as a pretext for showing themselves disagreeable towards the Germans. But a large share in these manifestations was due to Sarah's artistic merit, and the actress took her leave, grateful for the reception given her by these blond giants whose stature had at first sight alarmed her fragile self.

Sarah was once more in Paris. She had six weeks in which to organize her American tour, prepare her luggage and say good-by to her friends. To refresh herself by renewed contact with her familiar five o'clock Court, where the idol's fresh laurels were fêted and her near departure deplored, was a pleasure of especial sweetness; but Sarah did not let herself be either moved to tears by sentimental considerations or discouraged by the difficulties which were predicted. Her com-

bative nature, on the contrary, was stirred by the prospect of facing new obstacles. The only regret she expressed was at having been unable to appear in Adrienne Lecouvreur and Froufrou in France. Duquesnel, the vigilant witness of her first successes as a beginner, assured her that there was still time to fulfil her wishes. The former manager of the Odéon proposed the hasty organization of a tour of the provinces. Sarah accepted enthusiastically. Her courage appeared to have no limits, though she feared that the time for the preparations was too short. However, in less than a week, Duquesnel had got together a company and arranged an itinerary. For twenty-eight days - Sarah Bernhardt's famous twenty-eight days - the actress toured the country, carrying from town to town the triumph which seemed henceforth inseparable from her.

On September 30th she was back in the capital, and feverishly began her preparations. She was as delighted as a little girl over this first big voyage that she was about to undertake. She did not for a moment lose sight of the moral responsibilities of her mission, but she could not refrain from wild frolics of joy among the cases and trunks in which the kindly Mme. Guérard was laying the magnificent costumes destined for the actress's various rôles.

At the last moment difficulties arose, for Jeanne, Sarah's younger sister, to whom important parts had been entrusted, fell ill. It was decided that she should join the tour as soon as she recovered, but meanwhile a substitute had to be obtained; and one was found in

the person of Marie Colombier, an old and faithful friend of Sarah's who would be delighted to travel to the New World in company with the famous actress whose friendship she sought more and more as time went on. Before their departure, Marie Colombier, like a practical woman, called at the offices of the Evėnement, and signed a contract undertaking to keep the newspaper informed of the incidents of the forthcoming journey — in other words, the slightest words and actions of Sarah Bernhardt.

On October 15th the company embarked on the liner Amérique. Sarah took with her the faithful Mme. Guérard, her maid, all her domestic staff and her company, including Marie Colombier, Angélo, Pierre Berton, Paul Mounet and other artists more or less well known. She took no fewer than a hundred pieces of luggage, the contents of which were to involve her in epic battles with the American customs.

"All visitors ashore!" Amid the shouts, the sobbing and laughter and creaking of ropes as the ship moved slowly out, Sarah Bernhardt leaned over the rail, her eyes fixed on the quay, seeing nothing but a slender silhouette which rapidly diminished to a small black speck—her son, Maurice Bernhardt. When she could no longer see even this black speck, she ran below and shut herself in her cabin to weep.

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The Sarah Bernhardt tour did not inaugurate any new phase in the history of the French theater. It may

be pointed out, however, that only one French actress, Rachel, had at this date ventured on to the new continent, and the Rachel tour had been a gloomy epic. Everywhere the great tragedienne had met with indifference and humiliation. The American people, too young at that time, had not appreciated that most subtle dramatic art, the fruit of the long-standing traditions of France. Even now, many years later, the arrival of Sarah Bernhardt obviously excited more curiosity than artistic interest. It must not be forgotten that only fifteen years had passed since the end of the Civil War and that the abolition of slavery — the result of what bitter struggles! - was also only fifteen years old. In 1880, a higher civilization was just dawning for the United States. The cities, which in fifty years would be gigantic capitals, then offered the modest aspect of provincial towns. Industrial development was at its beginning, and the inhabitants were sturdy, uncultured pioneers, eager for gain - stout workers, exclusively preoccupied in amassing a fortune, with little esteem or understanding for art and letters.

To this new country, its manners as yet unrefined by time and leisure, there came from Paris, the intellectual center of Europe par excellence, one of the most sophisticated interpreters of the "decadent," fin de siècle Latin civilization. It might well be wondered what reception the representative of an intellectual élite would meet with from this laborious nation of rabid materialists, whose struggle for existence did not allow any leisure to be reserved for the things of

the mind. Sarah Bernhardt had need of all her selfconfidence, all her thirst for the unknown, all her love of fighting, to face the Yankee monster with such carefree serenity.

In the opinion of many, indeed, this tour was but a pretext for a distant excursion on the part of an actress wounded in her vanity. In reality, it was inaugurated rather on the lines of a vast commercial enterprise, "boosted" by extravagant advertising — the importation of a Parisian attraction conducted by two experienced business men. It was necessary to conform to the standards of this kingdom of "big business." where the worth of an individual was measured by his wealth, and where in consequence the value of an actress was estimated by the price paid to see her. Sarah's two managers had the seats for the first performance sold by auction. "If a stall costs ten dollars, the program must be worth it." Having reasoned thus, the public fought for tickets. Abbey and Jarrett had ceded them at exorbitant prices, and the majority were resold at a profit by the first purchasers.

Sarah's company was to open at the Booth Theater, which welcomed any type of program, provided it was sensational. Opera singers, conjurers, Siamese twins and other monstrosities succeeded one another there, and the public did not greatly discriminate between the various spectacles offered; they regarded everything equally as an exhibition. Thus the French star was awaited with an impatience in which there was more curiosity than sympathy. The public had been

wrought to a state of excitement by the intense publicity given to the actress's name and personality. They foresaw a "great attraction." When the day came, therefore, the disappointment of the audience threatened to turn into irritation when the curtain fell on the first act of Adrienne Lecouvreur without Sarah having appeared. The crowd grumbled, and one spectator, to prove his knowledge of commercial values and his determination not to be "done," went to demand his money back, since Bernhardt did not appear in all the acts. All Jarrett's professional skill and persuasiveness were required to wean the Yankee from his strange conception of the dramatic art.

In spite of the peculiar mental atmosphere which this public breathed, Sarah was no sooner on the stage than the miracle was accomplished. The sweet voice and the enchanting grace of this frail creature bewitched the audience instantly. At each subsequent performance her success was intensified, and in the fifth act all the triumphs achieved by Sarah on the stages of Europe were surpassed. Such was the multitude awaiting her at the exit that the actress had difficulty in regaining her hotel, her way being barred by so many hands anxious to shake hers vigorously; and far into the night the crowd, massed under her windows, continued to shout at the top of their voices, by way of a serenade: "Good night, Sarah, good night!"



~ XIX ~

THE AMERICAN TOUR HAD A DOUBLE significance in Sarah Bernhardt's mind. Firstly, it was to soothe her vanity as an actress, profoundly shaken by her failure at the Comédie-Française. There was no doubt, indeed, that a striking transatlantic success would send as far as Paris echoes of the international renown she was about to acquire. All those who had refused to trust in her or had foolishly scoffed at her would then be humiliated by her triumph. Such was the first victory she expected from this voyage. But there was also a second victory which the restless, avid mind of the actress proposed to achieve in the new field of America. In France and the rest of Europe the theatrical career, though it required talent, was nevertheless simply a profession; in the New World it was a different matter. To initiate the young idea of America into art, spreading esthetic enthusiasm as others spread their faith and the religion of their God -this seemed to Sarah Bernhardt a mission. She wished to leave an ineffaceable impression of her ephemeral creations, to impregnate these virgin minds with a superior ideal, fruit of an age-old civilization. When she landed on American soil, Sarah Bernhardt was conscious of the difficulty and the importance of the task she had set herself.

If the first contact had been unreservedly favorable to her, the ovations she subsequently received were more than once mingled with hisses, addressed, it is true, not to the actress, but to the woman, referred to as the "French courtezan." Sarah Bernhardt's name was indeed better known than one would have believed, but less by the celebrity of her talent than by the rumors of the actress's oddities and eccentricities, real or invented. The stories which had at all times been circulated regarding her had landed on the American continent at the same time as herself, and now preceded her from town to town throughout her tour.

The religious voke which, about the eighth decade of the nineteenth century, still weighed heavily on the country contributed a large share towards the difficulties of her situation. The pastors were all-powerful, and their word was law in the cities. They made good use of the green-room gossip about the actress and the stories exchanged in the corners of drawing-rooms, and strongly impressed the minds of the puritan population, austere in its morals and deeply respectful of tradition. The civic ideal of America was then a simple existence divided between work and piety; the hours of leisure were devoted to reading the Bible, going to church and indulging in a few distractions recognized as innocent. The novelists of Europe, and French authors in particular, were accused of loose morality and eschewed by this population of rigorists.

This sketch of the milieu in which Sarah was to move

makes it possible to gage the effect produced by the appearance of her company. From every pulpit a resounding anathema was hurled upon this influx of pernicious literature and upon the actress carrying it from city to city, a kept woman, a courtezan and mother of a bastard.

Commercial enterprise took a hand, and it was not long before pamphlets were put in circulation, filled with suggestive details of inconceivable silliness. One, entitled The Love-affairs of Sarah Bernhardt, accused the actress, that "monster of the Apocalypse," of having seduced in turn the Tsar, Napoleon III and Pius IX. The author explained at length that Sarah might boast of having been on excessively intimate terms with all the crowned heads and all the celebrities of Europe. Another little book of the same nature affirmed quite solemnly that our heroine was the mother of four sons, whose respective fathers were a hairdresser, Napoleon III, the Pope and a man condemned to death for parricide.

It is difficult not to feel slightly shocked at the fantastic lucubrations conceived by the chaste minds of these apostles of puritanism. Their accusations were even more grotesque than venomous; but the study of such publications did not fail to inflame a number of the faithful.

This perfervid scandal-mongering, in which the ludicrous and the odious disputed for precedence, delighted Jarrett. Such publicity as this, the best that could be imagined, and free as well, overwhelmed the

impresario with satisfaction. For if a small number, the most timid of the flock, followed the prescriptions of their pastors forbidding the frequentation of theaters, the majority could not resist their curiosity to behold the "monster." The most "immoral" plays, Froufrou and Adrienne Lecouvreur, were the most enjoyed by the audiences, and the takings were fabulous.

After being at first considerably irritated at the "enormities" lavished on her name, Sarah Bernhardt made up her mind to laugh at them. It would be undignified to let herself be affected by such gross nonsense. For instance, when one journalist asked her if she had really had four children, she retorted: "Four children and no husband? Anyway, that's better than having four husbands and no children, which often happens with you." Another time, she addressed thus a minister who had just thundered against her for an hour: "My dear confrère, why fall on me like this? We play-actors ought to understand one another!"

The most violent participants in the campaign against the actress were the women. They feared that this reputed seducer would steal their husbands and sons from them. At Orangetown the mothers convoked a meeting to discuss the curious problem, "how to defend ourselves against Sarah Bernhardt, who has come to corrupt our sons."

In short, a veritable "Sarah Bernhardt question" was created in the States. Everyone awaited the arrival of the actress in a spirit of mingled fear and desire; for this enigmatic woman represented to them all an

embodiment of damnation and of sensuous pleasure. The puritan fury which was unleashed everywhere gave a unique "news value" to the tour. The more brutal the attacks were, the better the advertisement. The Bishop of Chicago distinguished himself particularly by the virulence of two sermons; so the second impresario, Abbey, who in his spare time was a man of considerable wit, addressed him an ironical note of thanks: "Sir, I am accustomed, when I come to your town, to spend four hundred dollars on advertising. As, however, you have done the advertising for me, I am sending you two hundred dollars for your poor."

All the plays in Sarah's repertoire aroused the same frantic enthusiasm from crowded houses. The tour did not meet with a single failure except, perhaps, at Montreal. The last performance given by the company in this town took place on Christmas Eve. On this solemn night the inhabitants obeyed the injunctions of their bishop, and did not come to hear the "demon." Sarah was bitterly vexed at the sight of an almost empty auditorium, but the enthusiasm of the few dozen spectators avenged her amply for this defection, for when she left the theater these irrepressible lovers of art rushed to unharness the actress's horses and pulled her sleigh to the hotel. The rumor of this triumphal return was at once spread abroad and earned the actress a tremendous retrospective success.

In spite of the wild stories of which she was the subject and the desire to be forgotten which she sometimes appeared to feel, Sarah had not interrupted the series of her accustomed eccentricities. At the height of the scandal which was raging about her, she seemed anxious to give a handle to fresh accusations. She did not conceal the fact that she had taken part in hunting-parties in Louisiana. At an armorer's establishment, before a crowd of curious onlookers, she practised firing a cannon. She had bought a crocodile. which soon died because she had filled it up with champagne. Just as in Paris, her lightest words and actions were immediately made public. The echo of them even reached Europe, where her artistic mission was much less discussed than the incorrigible actress's novel inspirations in the way of oddity. Marie Colombier, in the "Lettres d'Amérique" which she addressed regularly to the Evénement, did not fail to do her little share in displaying to the best advantage (though with all discretion) the burlesque ups-anddowns of the Sarah Bernhardt tour-

For Marie Colombier was disappointed, and avenged herself in the only way open to her. When she embarked with her illustrious friend, she had expected a superior position; but she soon had to climb down, for Jeanne, Sarah's sister, recovered within a fortnight and took up the parts originally allotted to her. Marie Colombier was relegated to the wings in the quality of a potential understudy. Humiliated by the effacement to which she was condemned, vexed at having no part to act in this stormy tour, she gradually developed a secret hatred for Sarah. She nourished the blind and stubborn rancor of the unsuccessful against

the actress who had "arrived" and was famous, detesting this former schoolfellow of the Conservatoire who had reached the rank of a star and now eclipsed the modest talents of all who worked conscientiously in her shadow.

Sarah, however, seemed untroubled by the small jealousies which her glory excited in those about her; she was too intoxicated by her personal triumph to heed anything else. Incontestably she had conquered this American public, strongly prejudiced though it had been against her art and herself. When the crowds shouted, as she passed: "Three cheers for Sarah Bernhardt! Three cheers for France!" she was doubly flattered, in her vanity and in her patriotism.

The balance-sheet of the tour was more than satisfactory, in spite of a few regrettable incidents: 157 performances in 50 different towns, tidy profits, and practically always a profusion of flowers and applause. Sarah was conscious that this result was due to her personal merits, and the fact gave her a certain pride. The sole function of the rest of the company had been to give creditable support to the star. For the rest, there were no great names among them; Paul Mounet was far from possessing the talent of his brother, while Angélo, to whom Sarah had entrusted the principal male characters, was quite a commonplace type of performer. But, in default of any outstanding artistic gifts, this Hercules was full of courage, coolness and daring. He was an excellent traveling companion, and, aided by the minor adventures of the journey.

a more intimate bond soon arose between the famous tragedienne and the second-class actor. It was clearly evident, however, that the intimacy which united these two, springing as it did from this chance journey together, would not survive for long.

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As she prepared for her return to France, well satisfied with the result of her peregrination, Sarah was seized by a certain doubt. What reception had Paris in store for her? Would she be fêted like the prodigal son, or would people adopt a cold and intentionally disdainful attitude towards her, passing a severe judgment on the commercialism and excessive publicity of her tempestuous circuit? The news that reached her from France made either hypothesis plausible. A cable arriving at the last moment put an end to the perplexity of the actress. The Société des Sauveteurs du Havre asked her, on landing at this town, to give a performance in aid of the families of lifeboat men. Sarah was unspeakably overjoyed, and replied in the affirmative.

This charity performance won her in advance the sympathy of the inhabitants of Le Havre. Paris was equally moved, and crowded trains left the capital for Le Havre. Many Parisians were anxious to greet the actress at her landing, and the crowd was unanimous in its acclamations as she passed. Enthusiastic speeches saluted her arrival: "We have come also to congratulate you on the immense success you have obtained

wherever you have been during your courageous journey. You have now achieved in both the Old and the New World an artistic celebrity and popularity which are beyond dispute, and your marvelous talent, added to your personal charm, have carried abroad the assurance that France is still the home of art and the cradle of elegance and beauty."

The whole company was thrilled with delight; only Marie Colombier did not share in the general rejoicings. She had, indeed, some reason; for at their landing some bailiffs had seized all her luggage, and Sarah Bernhardt, on whom the responsibility for this misadventure rested, had refused to take any interest in the misfortune which had befallen one of her actresses. The incident was not tragic; but it contributed to the growth of the suppressed ill will which Marie Colombier had accumulated during the American tour.

That same evening, Sarah, deeply moved by the occasion, played one of her great American successes—

La Dame aux Camélias—for the first time in France.

The rôle of Marguerite Duplessis gave scope for all the resources of her wonderful sensibility. The magnificent ovation accorded her by way of thanks made her finally certain that she was welcome on the soil of France after her seven months' absence.

Two months later, installed once more in her house in the Avenue de Villiers, Sarah Bernhardt received a visit from Victorien Sardou, who brought with him the manuscript of a new play, Fédora. The dramatist was then in the fifties; he had been a member of the Académie Française for four years and a favorite of the public for twenty-three. He was a conspicuously successful author, in spite of the vigorous attacks which the critics frequently lavished upon him. Sarah read the play in transports of delight. She thanked the master warmly for the splendid part he offered her, and fell asleep full of confidence in the faithful star which henceforth guided her fortunes.

Raymond Deslandes, the manager of the Vaudeville, who had already sounded her before her departure, was not long in visiting her in his turn, and it was decided to present Fédora. Everything was going excellently, and the matter was practically settled when Jarrett, the autocratic Jarrett, appeared on the scene and claimed the artist for a tour on the Continent. All arrangements had been made, and Sarah must needs obey. She was no longer her own mistress, free to dispose of her time and her person; she was the slave of the impresario.

The new "mission" proposed to her was happily not of a nature to displease her. To set out in conquest of the European public, more polished, more educated and consequently more blasé than the public of North America, was a difficult but attractive task. And when adventure offered, Sarah Bernhardt was always ready.

~ XX ~

Paris in November! The deadly breath of autumn had yellowed the foliage in the Avenue de Villiers. A slender, handsome man alighted from a cab before one of the houses in this fashionable quarter. He seemed hardly more than thirty. His movements were supple and harmonious, his expression keen and confident; and as he paused outside the door to straighten his tie, several passers turned to look at this visitor who was about to call on Sarah Bernhardt.

On being admitted to the vestibule, the man handed his card to the parlormaid, who soon reappeared and led him into a richly furnished salon, requesting him to wait a few moments. The visitor sat down, got up, then sat down again, impatiently. At last he heard the sound of soft footsteps on the thick carpet. La grande Sarah—but no; instead of the young and famous actress, it was another woman who appeared in the doorway. She invited the caller to be seated and herself took an armchair. Then she introduced herself as Madame Guérard, and asked M. Damala to tell her what Sarah could do for him. The young man felt ill at ease; he did not know who this woman was. However, he replied that the actress was expecting him and that he had come merely to sign a contract. Thereupon

Mme. Guérard questioned the young man with interest; he, somewhat startled by this untimely curiosity, informed her that he was to accompany the Sarah Bernhardt tour through Europe. Mme. Guérard was surprised that she knew nothing about the newcomer. At last Sarah entered the salon, shook hands amicably with the young man, dismissed Mme. Guérard and reassured the visitor by telling him that the good lady was her companion.

The formalities of signing the contract were soon completed. Jarrett, the impresario of the company, would settle the question of salary with the young man later. The undertaking which had just been signed was only provisional, and its sole aim was to ensure the beginner of the actress's benevolent sympathy and promises.

The tour opened at Brussels, a city which the year before had already become acquainted with the talent of the great artist who now returned within its walls. The theater was packed for the first night. All Brussels was there, from the humblest people to the royal family, and the King himself, forgetting his dignity as a monarch, applauded with as much enthusiasm as any shopgirl in the gallery. All the applause, of course, went as usual to Sarah; the rest of the company were mere ciphers. But the actress noted that her young colleague Damala, whose stage name was Jacques Daria, realized all her hopes by his male beauty, his air of distinction, his harmonious voice and far-seeing glance. The critics themselves pronounced that if

Doña Sol was inimitable, the unknown young actor who played Don Carlos revealed a talent already highly developed.

After Belgium came Denmark, and the people of Copenhagen saluted in Sarah the artist who had already won in that city some of her first international laurels. Then came Holland and the Scandinavian countries. The blond, placid Nordic peoples were seized by a kind of fever when this fascinating stranger exhibited on the stage a whole range of emotions hitherto unknown to them. Damala-Daria no longer played only Don Carlos in Hernani, but filled also several leading parts in the repertoire, and the success he gained side by side with Sarah unconsciously drew the two nearer together. However, there was no bond between them except the love of the characters they acted. Sarah's present lover was still Angélo, and this fact was no secret to anybody; it was no secret, either, that the actress's feeling for this man was not particularly profound.

Norway was followed by Russia, where the tour had been planned to include, not only the capital, but the principal cities of the Empire. The first unpleasant incidents happened at Kiev, where bloody pogroms had taken place earlier in the year; rumors of the actress's Jewish origin got about and she was hissed. She had a similar reception at Odessa, where her carriage was stoned. The departure of the company from these two towns very much resembled flight. The well-disciplined Press, however, affected to be unaware of

the few blind, unfortunate rebels who had turned their attacks against Sarah.

The reception of the actress at Moscow fully compensated her for these unfortunate events and the annovance they had caused her; but this reception itself could not be compared with the festivities organized on her arrival at St. Petersburg, the residence of the Tsar. The aristocracy of the Russian Empire, so haughty and sometimes so cruel in its pride, placed itself literally at the feet of this converted Jewess. The whole Court was present at the Alexander Theater for the first performance of the company. Sarah Bernhardt was almost stifled by the flowers lavished upon her. The Government conferred on her various decorations; and her flat was transformed into a place of pilgrimage visited successively by the most illustrious ladies of the Empire, who idolized her, seeing in her an incarnation of the feminine ideal. With eager zeal they copied her dresses, exotic costumes which became ridiculous when worn by others. She was loaded with presents, billets-doux and impassioned declarations. In the course of this winter, St. Petersburg unfolded the whole wealth and magnificence of the Muscovite Empire in fêting Sarah. The Tsar, Alexander III, father of Nicholas II, set the example himself by presiding over the festivities organized in honor of the actress. One may even advance the theory that Sarah's visit to St. Petersburg acquired a political significance and that her genius worked to bring about a rapprochement between the French and Russian nations. The

actress's art commanded such respect from the aristocracy of St. Petersburg that this woman became a kind of ambassadress, whose letters of credit bore the seal, not of diplomacy, but of talent.

Vienna! In the capital of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, before the most cultivated and experienced audiences in Europe, Sarah Bernhardt revealed all the forms of her many-sided genius. The fame of her success was so widespread that the great lords of Hungary came from Budapest specially to admire her.

Whilst Europe was thus paying such ardent homage to her, Sarah was becoming more and more interested in her new recruit Damala, the young Greek, embodiment of perfect beauty. By the time the company reached Trieste and was preparing to cross the Austrian frontier to continue its tour in Italy, the actress, when she looked at her young colleague, or thought of him in her moments of solitude, experienced an emotion which she did not remember having felt ever before. Her relationship with Angélo was maintained out of habit alone. She knew that she did not love him, and she was conscious also of being attracted by the other, the young Greek Adonis, the grand seigneur from whose person the majestic grace of Olympus seemed to emanate. Unfortunately, however, beyond showing her the necessary marks of deference, Damala paid but little attention to his benefactress. This too obvious indifference wounded Sarah's vanity. Her first emotion had been provoked by the actor's exceptional good

looks; but after a certain moment the ever-increasing interest in him which she expressed must be imputed principally to pique. The time came when she, she who could not bear that those whose homage she desired should not fling themselves at her feet, would have been willing to resort to any of the thousand and one little feminine ruses in order to win Damala, had not her pride forbidden this method. Such artifices were incompatible with the longing for domination which tormented her. Was she not still beautiful enough, exciting enough, to conquer any masculine resistance whatever? During the journey from Trieste to Naples she dreamed of a happiness she had never known, and whilst she was scoring undistinguished successes in the Italian cities her thoughts and desires converged more and more imperiously upon her hero. She lost her mastery of herself upon the stage, and only her unequaled reputation enabled her still to play before crowded houses. The theater left her almost indifferent now. She had forgotten her mission, and the desire of the woman annihilated the ambition of the artist in her. Her whole will was dominated by her desires as a woman.

How was Damala to resist such an implacable will? He bowed before the love of this irresistible woman as before a decree of fate. Sarah realized that this was not the love she had hoped for in exchange for her passionate sentiments. Damala was, and remained, the only man in all her life whom she had to struggle to win.

Her feelings had a new impetuosity, and the atmosphere itself was favorable to the development of her love.

She was traveling for the first time through this Italy of which she had dreamed so much in her youth. She remembered the great loves of George Sand, her ideal of old. Behind her rose the mountains of Naples. and opposite them Capri stood out, black against a radiant sea. Neapolitan lads charmed their idle hours away by playing romances on the mandolin. Italy, amorous and romantic, had captured the soul of Sarah Bernhardt. She seemed to herself great, pure, sincere, during these unquiet days when she waited for happiness. She contemplated the two magnificent men who were by her side: the one to whom she was accustomed. the old love, Angélo; and the other, the new love, the unknown Damala. Among her companions it was felt that something was brewing, and as they were acquainted with Sarah's temperament they prophesied some drastic solution. Nobody, however, suspected what was actually going to happen.

The inevitable liaison began at Trieste. Damala felt for the actress only the interest of the male animal which every man experienced in Sarah Bernhardt's presence. In this union, it was she who contributed the greater sincerity, the greater attachment and the greater passion. Perceiving the truth clearly, she doubted her ability to hold her lover long; she had observed that Damala showed an interest in one of the younger actresses in the company; and she was afraid.

Then Sarah made up her mind to marry Damala.

Angélo was the first to be informed of this disconcerting but irrevocable intention. After a scene of which no trustworthy account remains, he received the amount of his salary for the entire tour and set out for Paris via Marseilles. But, even before he had reached the capital, the news was already current there that Sarah Bernhardt was preparing to accomplish the most astonishing act of her life.

On March 30th, 1882, the company gave their last performance at Naples. The next was to take place at Nice on April 4th. Thus Sarah had four days in which to fasten more lasting bonds upon the man who seemed to embody the greatest love of her life. The matter, however, was not so simple as she might have wished. She was a Catholic, Damala a member of the Orthodox Church; according to the ecclesiastical laws of Italy, the marriage was impossible. In France other difficulties would intervene. Apparently it was necessary that the betrothed couple should contract their marriage in London. But London is nearly 1,000 miles from Naples as the crow flies, and the distance by rail was even greater. Never mind! Sarah Bernhardt wanted to be married!

On the morning of March 31st she sent a telegram to one of her London friends setting forth her intentions: "Mon cher, I am visiting London for a few hours only, just long enough to get married, and shall then leave the city immediately. My fiance's name is Aristide Damala. He is a Greek, I am French. I am

calling upon your kindness to do all that is necessary so that I do not miss my train, for I am playing at Nice next Wednesday. I leave Naples to-morrow morning and will send you a telegram to tell you the time of my arrival."

Having despatched this somewhat confused text, she began her preparations for the journey, and four hours later sent off a second telegram announcing her arrival on Monday evening.

Up till the last moment she gave no warning to any of her companions. Only on Sunday morning did she inform them that she had to leave on the spot, adding, to reassure the company, that she would be at Nice for the performance on Wednesday. At the last minute she despatched a third telegram: "What I have decided must be done, must be done. . . ."

From this tone, we recognize our Sarah Bernhardt. The precipitate rush of these unexpected events, anticipating the era of the cinema by their brusque succession, and this abrupt solution, startling as it was—all these things were true emanations of the impulsive character we have so often seen at work. What she had decided, whether it were a well-thought-out solution or the whim of a moment, must be executed. What Sarah wanted she wanted at once, and the obstacles blocking her way served only to excite her energy and confirm her decisions. She knew that marriage was the only means of keeping Damala with her. For the rest, this action would do no harm to her career. Perhaps, too, some reminiscences of a middle-class ideal, long

since forgotten, may have had a momentary recrudescence. In the midst of the stormy life she lived, she found pleasure in the thought of a peaceful old age, by the domestic fireside. Such ideas were in contradiction with her own essential personality. But her warm heart did not cast out these sentimental dreams; the star had given place to the woman.

The bridal pair arrived in London at the intended hour. During the night they prepared their papers and accomplished the indispensable formalities as quickly as possible. Next morning at eight o'clock, the time fixed for the ceremony, they presented themselves at St. Andrew's, Well Street. But the bridegroom in his great haste had left his papers behind, and had to return to fetch them. The consequent delay meant that the two artists would miss their train and were forced to give up the idea of performing at Nice. Their desperate race was rendered vain, and Sarah would be unable to fulfil her engagement.

It was a little after ten o'clock when the couple presented themselves before the clergyman, Mr. Greenwood. It was April 4th, 1882. At half-past ten, Sarah Bernhardt, in the sight of God and man, took the name of Damala. She was nearly thirty-eight and her husband twenty-seven.

During the Monday afternoon the rumor had run through Paris that Sarah Bernhardt had passed through the town, on her way to London to marry an insignificant foreigner. The notion was scoffed at as a myth. For almost the whole world, Sarah Bernhardt was at that moment on her way to Nice, where she would very shortly arrive, not returning to Paris for another six weeks. And now, suddenly, it was announced that after spending one night in London, Sarah Bernhardt was married. The sensational news was immediately wired to the newspapers of two continents. It was added that the actress was on the way to Marseilles.

In Paris people wondered what wild motive had induced Sarah thus to link her life and her fame, at the very apogee of her career, to a nobody whose talents were certainly mediocre. At Nice, the company awaited her impatiently. On Wednesday, the day of the performance, the helpless impresarios were frantic with anxiety; they had received no news from the actress for five days, and all the seats were sold. Shortly before the time of the performance, telegrams arrived in place of the actress, who said that she would be happy to pay the 25,000 francs' compensation stipulated for breach of contract.

Little did Sarah care for this loss of money, little did she care for these five days of nervous tension and superhuman fatigue, since it was in the society of an adored busband that she could now, on April 5th, embark for Spain to rejoin her company. In these first days of married life, it gave her a curious sensation to feel herself a wife, to reflect that her happiness had received the consecration desired by respectable middleclass maidens. This woman, vowed in some sort to a destiny more masculine than feminine, fated to embody joy and suffering, allowed herself to be duped by her own wishes.

In Paris the sensation created by the news continued. Nobody could explain the act, nobody could discover the motives, and curiosity was increased by the fact that nothing whatever was known about the bridegroom, who had not yet been seen on the Parisian stage. The reporters plunged into industrious researches to establish the man's identity, and a legend was soon developed which corresponded fairly closely with the facts.

Aristide Damala belonged to a rich family of the high Society of Greece. His father, Ambrose Damala, was a wealthy business man of Hermopolis; his mother the daughter of one of the founders of the National Bank of Greece, Lucas Ralli. Born on January 18th, 1855, Aristide Damala had come to Marseilles with his parents as a child, but had retained his Greek nationality in spite of his French upbringing. In 1875 he had joined the Greek cavalry and had soon acquired the reputation of being the most handsome and elegant officer in the whole Army. His aspirations to poetry had made him a frequenter of salons, where he had recited languorous poems in his warm and melodious voice. He was a favorite with women, the hero of several Society adventures, and was eventually obliged to leave the Army. His fine carriage and distinction at once opened the career of diplomacy to him; he served first in the two Russian capitals, Moscow and St. Petersburg, then was nominated attaché to the Greek

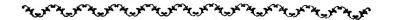
Legation in Paris. During these years he had rapidly squandered his immense patrimony. Finding himself at last practically without resources, he had resolved to try his luck on the stage, and, hearing that Sarah Bernhardt was organizing a company in view of an extensive European tour, he had obtained through an acquaintance a recommendation to the actress, who had decided to accept his services.

This romantic story, fabulous enough in itself, was adorned with many further ramifications. The general amazement did not diminish, and the public was all the more impatient to see Sarah again since she had not appeared on the Parisian stage for two years, during which her reputation had increased considerably. All the habitués of the theaters, all the dramatic critics, awaited her return with impatience, deploring the length of this tour which deprived them of the great artist and her husband, whose beauty was already legendary. Sarah, however, still tarried beyond the frontiers, not arriving at Marseilles until a month later on her return from Spain — that Spain which she had not seen since her flight there, long ago. And after Marseilles came Grenoble, then Switzerland, where she acted for the first time before the cultivated audiences of Geneva, then Rouen and Brussels, whence she returned at last to Paris, though only for a few days, in the second half of May.

These few days were long enough for her to renew her contact with the public of Paris, this time by the side of her husband. It was the 26th of May — a memorable date. For the first time, Damala performed in Paris. For the first time, abandoning his pseudonym but retaining the Christian name, he presented himself under the name of Jacques Damala. For the first time in the French capital, Sarah Bernhardt acted the titlerôle of La Dame aux Camélias, her greatest success during the years to come.

The performance took place at the Variétés, for the benefit of the widow of Jules Chéret, the well-known designer for the stage. Sarah could not conceal her nervousness, although this occasion was of little importance from the artistic point of view; she awaited with no less anxiety than the public the scene in which Damala was to appear. Her emotion reminded her of the agitation she had felt when she played the Queen in Ruy Blas for the first time, and when ovations greeted the entry of the young actor, who was much applauded in the rôle of Armand Duval, her joy was as great as on that distant day of her youth.

Soon afterwards Sarah left for England to complete her interrupted tour; Damala, who replaced Angélo in the company, went with her. London hailed the return of the actress, now within its walls for the fourth time, and the same enthusiastic reception was reserved for her at Brighton, Blackpool and Manchester. When, in the middle of the summer, Sarah finally returned to Paris to stay, she knew that her renown was solidly established throughout Europe and that one of the great aims of her life was attained, for she had gained fame, conquered the insulting doubts of her adversaries and won the full consciousness of her true capacities.



~ XXI ~

SARAH BERNHARDT NOW WISHED TO see the reputation she had acquired by her tours through Europe and North America ratified by France. She concentrated her whole energy on this aim; for she considered it of capital importance to regain by a single stroke the first place on the French stage.

Luck favored the actress. On her return from the tour, the Ambigu was for sale, and she bought it, thus realizing an old ambition. Like Déjazet, she now had ber theater. In consequence, her husband could play opposite her in any play for which she might think him suitable. Her rôles and those of her partners would no longer depend on the will of a manager or an impresario, but on herself alone.

She could not, however, think of occupying the managerial chair herself; some docile agent, a kind of understudy in whom she could have entire confidence, was indispensable. Only one person combined the required qualities—her son Maurice. But the young man was barely eighteen years old. Never mind! His mother would emancipate him. The formalities were hastily accomplished, and Maurice Bernhardt became legally manager of the Ambigu.

The first piece given at this theater under the new management was a drama by Catulle Mendès: Les Mères ennemies. Much to the general disappointment, Sarah did not play in it. She was devoting herself exclusively to the study of her part in Fédora, and she applied all the more zeal and attention to her work because it provided a means of distraction from the disappointments of her married life. For already an unhappy ending to her strange union could be foreseen. The public, which was not slow in finding out about her conjugal troubles, made the most of them: titillated by the little drama they divined, people seasoned it with comments, more or less malicious, which wounded the actress profoundly. "Ah!" they said. "She thought she could buy herself a husband at the price of a theater and fame. That is not enough for the young and fiery Damala. This comfortable existence bores him. As a distraction, he amuses himself with other women."

Whatever was the foundation of the rumors which were circulated, it is certain that discord reigned in Sarah's domestic life. Sarah was autocratic. She could not bear to be contradicted. She wished to impose her will and pleasure upon her entourage, who, after all, depended upon her for their existence. Damala well knew that he owed everything to this famous actress, but he judged her somewhat too insistent in reminding him of the fact. He was conscious of the falseness of his position, and in the end rebelled against this "tyr-

anny." Weary of a yoke which he had never either accepted or tolerated with any particular enthusiasm, he soon deserted his wife's home. To escape from Sarah the more effectively, he left France and took refuge in Africa, where he joined a battalion of Spahis shortly afterwards.

This brutal rupture affected Sarah more than she would allow to appear. Certainly she had learned to do violence to her feelings and not to linger over vain regrets in her sentimental reverses; but this time she hardly knew herself, so greatly was she humiliated and left at a loss by her husband's desertion. She dragged herself through a lamentable kind of existence; for the first time, her will failed her. The energetic Sarah Bernhardt was now nothing but a poor, limp creature, offering no resistance to the blows of fate.

To complete her misfortunes, she was harassed incessantly by severe anxieties of a material order. The Ambigu was tottering on the brink of failure. Maurice Bernhardt, too young for his position, lacked experience, and, above all, authority. This eighteen-year-old manager made an unfavorable impression both on the staff and on the public. Opinion refused to approve of this curious appointment; it was regarded as a new whim on the part of the actress, and one which revealed her evident wish to "pull the public's leg."

On December 12th, 1882, she presented Fédora. The play itself was somewhat severely judged by the dramatic critics, but it scored a complete triumph with the public. The most acid of the reviewers were

forced to acknowledge the entire success of Sarah's own part in it. All that any of them, such as Arthur Heuillard, could say against her was that her victory was an easy one, since "the author had taken her as a model for the character she created"; it was an easy task, some suggested, for the impulsive actress to sustain a part consisting of "a fit of hysterics in several tableaux."

Sarah Bernhardt seemed at the apogee of her talent. A frail, mysterious creature in flowing garments heavy with rich ornamentation; a scented atmosphere emanated from her, an aroma of the exotic, an attraction which was at once erotic and cerebral in its nature. Her diction was a disquieting melody, her voice an opium which lulled the senses. Her acting gave form to a new conception of dramatic art. The overemphasis of so-called classic simplicity was superseded by the evolution of an art of extreme richness, full of subtleties and studied, delicate effects. It is true that the slightly decadent refinements of her technique were understood better by the initiated than by the general public, but the actress possessed such power of suggestion that she literally hypnotized her audience, however it might be composed.

In spite of this success, the era of debts and insoluble difficulties was about to begin for Sarah. After the run of the new play put on at the Ambigu—La Glu, by Jean Richepin—the enterprise was wound up with a deficit of 400,000 francs. Gone were the days of careless insouciance when the actress, in the glow of the

footlights, could indulge herself in delightful dreams! The same illusions were not permitted to the proprietor of a theatrical establishment. This brief period of management at the Ambigu inaugurated for Sarah Bernhardt the series of financial embarrassments which, beneath an appearance of opulence, kept her imprisoned for the rest of her life in their inextricable coils. Thus, the heroine of so many scandals, the protagonist also in an unhappy marriage, shortly found herself compelled to sell her jewels by auction. On the appointed day the sale room was invaded by the whole demi-monde of Paris. Like hounds around their quarry, women fought for the coveted spoils of the famous actress, desperately bidding louis upon louis. This sale gave Sarah some respite, but it was a sad humiliation to see all her marvelous trinkets, souvenirs of a radiant past, dispersed in the hands of the profane. . . .

However, the breathing-space afforded by this realization of assets enabled the actress to liquidate after a fashion the disastrous affair of the Ambigu. But how could she taste repose? To retire now would be to give her enemies the opportunity to proclaim her defeat. No! Sarah did not mean her career to be considered as finished already. She leased the Porte Saint-Martin Theatre with the intention of presenting the great successes of her tours, Froufrou and La Dame aux Camélias, to put herself on her feet financially and restore her reputation as an actress. She regarded this supreme venture as a kind of "sheet-anchor," and told

herself that in case of failure there would be nothing more to do but shut up shop and leave the boards.

It was just at this time that Damala, tired of an adventurous sojourn in Africa, reappeared in Paris; he was engaged at the Gymnase immediately and was warmly applauded every night. Sarah was not unaffected by the echoes of his success, for she realized that her husband's talent was acclaimed principally to taunt her with her conjugal misfortunes. Determined to put an end to this painful situation, Sarah Bernhardt asked for a divorce.

Since Damala had left her she had formed a relationship with Jean Richepin. The meeting of the novelist-poet and the actress had somewhat the aspect of the work of fate. Richepin, five years younger than Sarah, was already celebrated, like herself; his fame was of the sensational kind and he had a rich tale of love-affairs to his name. He was the author of La Chanson des Gueux and the publication of this book had earned him a term of imprisonment, which had immediately sent the sales soaring. He was a man of persuasive charm, caustic wit and infectious spirits; he was also a trusty friend; in a word, the cheering companion who was called for in the actress's present state of distress.

The reopening of the Porte Saint-Martin with Froufrou was received with only a mediocre success. Sarah, who had just entered her fortieth year, might wonder whether her star was not near its setting! But she had still too much courage to let herself finish

thus, in a gray mediocrity. She rebelled against destiny, calling the whole force of her will to her aid. She had lived too long amid the uproars of fame not to be afraid of the silence which threatened her; but she meant to defend herself stubbornly, to fight against age and the indifference of the public.

When she decided to present Richepin's play Nana Sahib, she had a recrudescence of celebrity; but what kind of celebrity! The rumors of her liaison with the author of the piece were swollen by stories, more or less unpleasant. Disgust took possession of the actress, and her old enemy, despair, threatened to seize her. Retirement! Decline! She ruminated on these words with horror. Together with fame and fortune, she was losing her friends. Her receptions no longer had the exceptional brilliance of former days. . . .

Fear of abandonment and of old age haunted the unhappy woman during sleepless nights. She knew no rest save by the artificial aid of sedatives and soporifics. Drugs, accepted as a remedy for her misfortunes, imperceptibly insinuated themselves into her life.

~ XXII ~

In the first days of December 1883 a curious work appeared in the bookshop windows. Its title was: Mémoires de Sarah Barnum, and its author — Marie Colombier.

Sarah's acquaintance with Marie Colombier dated from over twenty years ago. They had met when both were students at the Conservatoire: and since then the two women had always remained on fairly cordial terms, although Sarah Bernhardt's dizzy rise to glory had imperceptibly created a distance between them. The famous actress treated her obscure comrade with some condescension, and the patronizing manner which she adopted in her dealings with her did not fail to offend the other, who nevertheless endeavored to conceal her feelings. During the American tour, Marie Colombier's sense of grievance was increased by the position of poor relation in which she found herself. She had repressed her anger, but at her return to Paris she still had not pardoned Sarah for her disappointment.

The famous actress, however, was indirectly the cause of a lucky stroke of business for Marie Colombier, who owed to her friend the connection with the *Evénement* which she formed through her "Lettres d'Amérique." This correspondence, less no doubt

through the very doubtful talent of the author than through the personage who furnished the pretext for the letters, had obtained a certain success, sufficient to induce Marie to abandon the theater, where she had vegetated for twenty years, and to embark on a career of journalism. Indeed, she received offers from several editors.

Meanwhile, she had become acquainted with a young writer named Paul Bonnetain, the author of a novel which claimed to be naturalistic, and might more accurately be described as pornographic, entitled Charlot s'amuse. Bonnetain, scenting the possibility of creating a scandal which might be profitably exploited, advised Marie Colombier, who said that she knew all about the private life of Sarah Bernhardt, to write a book on the celebrated actress. He himself composed the preface, saying, in effect, that it was time false idols were brought toppling from their usurped pedestals. Thereupon he proceeded with a violent attack upon Sarah Bernhardt; it is true that he did not actually name her, but the allusion was so clear and unequivocal that no one could possibly mistake the subject. As for the substance of the book written by Marie Colombier, it was a mass of flagrant coarseness and stupidity characterized by a total lack of taste or decency. For 350 pages the author complacently retails back-stairs "secrets" about Sarah and makes a ridiculous display of the so-called perversities of the actress; these were habits which are, in fact, common to a number of respectable women, but which

become odious as soon as they are described, particularly when spiced with risqué details. In this revolting piece of work, Sarah Bernhardt appears as an abnormal and profoundly perverted creature. There is not a word as to her talent as an actress, her energy, her character; only as to her alleged vices and turpitudes. This vindictive book is a masterpiece of detestable yet skilful perfidy.

Such an accumulation of filth could not but arouse contempt. The journalists of Paris, who would certainly not have hesitated to turn to account any other kind of confidences, recoiled from making use of this collection. It was as if a conspiracy of silence were formed regarding the work. Bonnetain and Marie Colombier seemed likely to lose their money, when Octave Mirbeau, the famous polemical writer, with the most honorable intentions in the world, attracted public attention by "flaying" Bonnetain copiously in a periodical called *Grimaces*. A duel followed on December 18th, in which Mirbeau wounded Marie Colombier's preface-writer. This was the signal for the scandal.

A few hours after the duel three young men mounted with determined footsteps the staircase leading to Marie Colombier's flat in the Rue de Thann. It was Maurice Bernhardt and two of his friends. Once admitted to the former actress's dwelling, Maurice Bernhardt, brandishing a cane with a menacing air, demanded that Marie Colombier should designate a man to fight him in her place and stead. The author

of the Mémoires de Sarah Barnum received these words with an ironical smile and tried to pass the matter off as a joke. But her face changed when Sarah appeared in her turn, accompanied by Richepin and armed with a whip and a dagger.

At once the interview threatened to take a tragic turn. Sarah Bernhardt was beside herself, shouting and threatening to strike her former friend. Marie Defreus, a member of the Odéon company, witnessed the scene, uttering cries of alarm. It was necessary for a young journalist who was present, Jehan Soufan, to intervene and lead Marie Colombier, under his protection, into another room. Furious at their prey escaping them thus, the assailants avenged themselves on the furniture. They turned everything upside down. smashed all the ornaments, and the uproar echoed through the whole house. Richepin, armed with a penknife, slit the hangings and ripped open the sofa. Sarah, choking with rage, roughly thrust aside everyone and everything that blocked her way, and swore to find her calumniator. She offered the maid a thousand francs to disclose the place where Marie Colombier was hiding. The latter, who was concealed behind a curtain in the next room, was considerably frightened. At last, their anger appeased, the visitors withdrew, leaving behind them a state of semi-ruin. The news of this avenging escapade set Paris in a tumult. The dailies consecrated whole columns to it. The correspondent of the New York Herald cabled 6,000 words on the incident to his paper. As for Marie Colombier's book, practically unknown the day before, its fortune was made. The first impression was sold out within a few days, and it finally reached its hundredth edition.

It was on the very day after this unfortunate sensation that the first performance of Nana Sahib took place. The auditorium of the Porte Saint-Martin was packed. The public knew from the posters that the author himself was interpreting the principal male part, and they were anxious to see one of the heroes of the affair. Thus the scandal of the day before was in part the cause of the crowded house. Nevertheless, the play was not a great success. The affair of Sarah Bernhardt versus Marie Colombier excited public interest far more than the artistic venture itself. The whole town uttered its comments and judgments on the incident, and two clans were rapidly formed. Some people reproached Marie Colombier for her perfidy, whilst others condemned Sarah Bernhardt for her overweening pride and loss of self-control. Albert Wolff held that her lack of moderation was perfectly excusable in "a woman who had been forced for 350 pages to blush before her son." He laid stress on the extenuating circumstances of the actress's violence, even though deploring its results.

"Admittedly," he wrote, "Sarah Bernhardt would have done better to stay at home, wrapping herself in the dignity of a great artist, and to leave public contempt to do justice to an abominable book. But one cannot expect a woman already suffering from nerves, and overstrung still further by the final rehearsals of an imperfect stage creation, to retain her coolness of judgment. Now the harm is done; the volume which everybody had ignored is selling, and it is Sarah who has brought this about; for anger is always a bad counselor."

Other journalists displayed less indulgence towards the actress: "Sarah was very ill-inspired in making an open scandal over her friend's book. This woman who exists only by publicity will at last succumb through that same publicity. . . . Insensibly a desert will be created around Sarah, and that arid soul will answer only to the name of Sabara."

Marie Colombier, on her side, decided to defend herself. She betook herself one fine evening to the theater where Sarah Bernhardt was playing, with the intention of making a scene in her turn; but a mechanic put her forcibly outside the door. Then she made up her mind to reply through the medium of the newspapers. She began by an open letter to Albert Wolff:

"You speak of undoing the harm that has been done. But am I the cause of it? I write a novel from imagination, and before it appears I am accused of depicting Sarah Bernhardt. I send a letter of rectification. The book is published, and my so-called victim says nothing. I meet her at the dress-rehearsal of *Pot Bouille*; I pass her son in the corridors; neither of them makes any complaint. But suddenly M. Mirbeau states that I have recounted the life of Sarah Bernhardt and

that my victims must avenge themselves. Mme. Sarah Bernhardt falls into the trap and invades my flat, thus making her friends ridiculous. Public opinion has already separated the grain from the chaff in this affair. Nobody would have recognized herself in Sarah Barnum without the clumsy intervention of these friends. If I regret having written a book which has been misinterpreted, Mme. Sarah Bernhardt should surely regret the outrage perpetrated on my home. Happy at the chance which has supplied a musical-comedy ending to the tragedy, the alleged persecutor of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt will not be the last to applaud the triumph of the great actress so eloquently prophesied by you."

In the end the public wearied of the joke. Marie Colombier and her wretched book, Sarah Bernhardt and her outbursts of anger, were soon submerged together in the most complete ridicule. Of the two heroines of this painful business, neither came out of it with very much credit; but Sarah, being the more famous, had the more occasion to suffer for it.

As for the secondary characters, they had equally little cause to congratulate themselves. Richepin was one of the most severely blamed; for, if the attitude of the two former friends is explicable, and even, by stretching a point, excusable, the part played by the writer is more difficult to understand and to justify. At the height of the battle there was published a brochure against Marie Colombier no less gross and ignoble than the book composed by the latter against

Sarah. The frontispiece displayed the name of Richepin, or, more exactly, Michepin - a childish precaution, this changing of a single letter! This far from brilliant exploit on the part of the writer (assuming that he really was the author of the brochure) roused public opinion more than all the incidents that had preceded it. For Richepin, as a chivalrous man, to fight a duel to avenge his lady's honor would have been perfectly admissible. It was harder to excuse him for resorting to this odious expedient to blacken his adversary's name. His friends were the first to be alarmed at the ascendency which the illustrious actress had gained over him. Had he not gone so far as to appear upon the boards himself? He seemed to them to be on a dangerous slope, and one publicist offered him a friendly warning: "Leave, we beg you, these rehearsalrooms, this grease-paint, these accessories, these wigs, this star; the star you should be following is of a very different kind! You are too good for such an end as this, you are above such a decline and fall; shake off the pitiful tinsel of this quarter-century, the age of Sarah. The mad woman's coffins were all well and good, her eccentricities were permissible; I do not wish to try the case of her strange existence over again, it is only too well known. But I have the right to protest aloud, for this time it is not a useless man, whose fate is indifferent, that she has got into her clutches; it is a poet, a man with a future, whom she has taken from us and is leading to ruin. . . . "

Richepin, the one-time sailor, the lewd and trucu-

lent poet of the Chanson des Gueux, was not the man to abandon those he cared for in misfortune. He replied to these counsels with a shrug; he knew what he was doing, and he knew what Sarah Bernhardt was worth.



~ XXIII ~

THE SITUATION OF THE PORTE SAINT-Martin Theatre remained precarious. As the performances continued, the failure of Nana Sahib, to Sarah's disappointment, became quite evident. Harassed by her financial worries, still shaken by the last waves of the Marie Colombier scandal, the unhappy actress fell into such a crisis of despair as she had never yet known, even in the most tragic hours of her life. She would stay for whole days shut up in her room, ruminating on her misfortunes. Old age rose before her, pitiless and implacable. Should she take refuge once more in flight? But she had traveled about the world now too much to have any hope of finding appeasement on foreign soil. There remained only the supreme solution - suicide. But, though life persisted in remaining cruel to her, death would have none of her. Sarah Bernhardt returned, therefore, to the theater, if not reconciled with existence, at least resigned to her destiny.

Yet she could find neither the strength nor the courage to undertake the creation of a new part. She chose one of the most outstanding successes of her touring repertoire: La Dame aux Camélias. This time her hopes were not deceived. During more than a hundred performances the Parisians followed with passionate at-

tention the agony of the romantic courtezan. But their enthusiasm did not preserve the actress from the discouragement which pervaded her whole being once she had left the wings. Nor did the company of Jean Richepin provide a remedy for her depression, as it had done some time before. Her love for the poet of the Chanson des Gueux had experienced the same fate as her other loves - a rapid decline. Nevertheless, the writer remained loyal to her in misfortune. He had just made a French adaptation of Macbeth; but, alas, Shakespeare's drama as revised by the author of Nana Sahib called forth the severest rigors of criticism! The sole result of its presentation on the stage was to hasten the final crash. Creditors of every variety, from the dressmaker to the tax-collector, surged round the unhappy manageress. Finally Duquesnel, still her faithful friend, took in hand the destinies of the establishment to prevent bankruptcy.

Thus relieved of her most disturbing preoccupations, her theater being now in sure and experienced hands, Sarah Bernhardt set out on a tour through the provinces. At the same time she took with her the manuscript of a play which she hoped might prove the means of restoring her theatrical credit in the capital: this was Sardou's new work, Théodora; and, whilst she mechanically acted the parts in her repertoire before provincial audiences, Sarah was haunted by thoughts of the creation she meant shortly to make of the enigmatic character of the courtezan empress.

The preparation of this rôle interested her so pas-

sionately that at the beginning of the summer she traveled to Ravenna. In this Italian setting, under the shadowy arcades of the Church of San Vitale, she evoked the legendary images of the Emperor Justinian and his consort Theodora. At the Ravenna Museum she made sketches for costumes based on frescoes and mosaics. Wherever she might be, she lived in communion with that long-dead woman, whom she understood and interpeted, and whose personality enchanted her as that of a great ancestor, a sister of long ago. Theodora! Was she not another Sarah Bernhardt, this woman who with her inflexible will was able to mount. one after another, all the rungs of the social ladder? Was not she too a woman of ambition and strength. insatiable in her thirst for the new, the impossible? A prostitute risen from the lowest dregs of society; an actress, mistress of the heir to the throne; and at last empress, reigning until her death, not only over the heart of the sovereign, but over the whole empire.

Sarah conceived Theodora as a true empress, an empress by vocation. What matter that a part of her life should be outwardly so miserable! On the contrary, Sarah admired the courage that could triumph over so many ordeals and hold destiny at bay until death. This example inspired her with the energy which she needed to maintain her refusal to capitulate. For ever since she seemed to have reached the topmost peak of glory, the actress feared perpetually lest a mortifying fall should bring her back abruptly, and without hope of return, to her starting-point. To

stimulate her will, she urged herself to conquer fate as the Eastern princess had done before her. So obsessed did she become with her rôle that, under the influence of the magnificent past which it evoked, she composed for herself a kind of artificial life, interesting herself solely in things which drew her nearer to the play she was preparing.

Meanwhile, she was not the only visitor of mark who sojourned within the walls of Ravenna. A young woman dressed extremely simply in white, who also visited the museum and studied the Byzantine collections, did not fail to note this creature of Oriental aspect in her unexpected, studied costume, her slight form draped in heavily ornamented garments. The young woman discreetly inquired of the curator of the museum as to the identity of this strange apparition, and the man whispered in her ear the famous name: "Sarah Bernhardt!"

Eleonora Duse, then barely twenty-five years old, had been acting only for three years, but she already stood out as an actress sure of herself, and had achieved very great success. Her dramatic style was regular and serene, in a sense more poetic than that of the French actress; but her pre-Raphaelite charm was infinitely less moving, because less vibrant with nervous tension.

Sarah Bernhardt was then just over forty. Her twenty-odd years on the stage; her double life rich in disasters, scandals and successes; her career which seemed an incoherent succession of ups and downs everything combined to make her a figure of mystery. Her contemporaries did not understand that all these contradictions were the fruits of an impulsive temperament, a tempestuous character, which concealed a delicate, sentimental spirit ever yearning for unknown happiness. They did not divine that her principal motive was pride, and her sole resource willpower. These inward revolts, at once externalized in the form of thoughtless, childish rages; these almost pathological variations of humor; this perpetual and never-appeased agitation; these nerve storms - all was to them inexplicable. Habit and application had given Sarah a kind of genius for the stage, but the essential character of her art did not lie in the strictly histrionic faculty, which consists in the actor's laying aside his private personality together with his everyday costume. Sarah's acting was conditioned by her feverish temperament - sometimes disfigured by it. She belonged to the race of those tormented by their own spirit, and her art, like her life, was eternal restlessness and disquiet.

Chance willed that the Duse and Sarah Bernhardt should create the rôle of Théodora almost at the same time, which explains their meeting in the museum at Ravenna. They formed an acquaintance, and in the course of a long, friendly conversation they revealed themselves to each other. The cordiality of their interview was not lessened by the divergence of their characters and of their views on the dramatic art.

The dissimilarity of their artistic sensibility was particularly well illustrated by their respective renderings of the identical part which they were called upon to play. The Duse saw in Theodora merely a sensual, sentimental courtezan; to this conception, Sarah opposed the woman of mind and autocratic will, thirsting for domination, whom she created in her own image.

After her stay at Ravenna, Sarah Bernhardt returned to Paris to commence the rehearsals of Théodora, not without feelings of apprehension. Despite the especial love and care with which she had prepared this rôle, she feared it. She was devoured by depression and chagrin. She had so many failures to redeem; and, besides, she realized more strongly than ever that she was at a dangerous turning in her career. Pitilessly the critics dissected her acting, recorded the lassitude of her gestures, noted a duller timbre in the famous "golden voice." Was it the result of travel, worry or excesses? None could say. On the whole, her performances had become very unequal. They were too visibly influenced by her variations of mood. The cares of her personal existence were casting a shadow over her artistic life. It was with more bitterness than anger that Sarah scrutinized the premonitory signs of her decline. She was fully conscious of the ravages which the last few years had wrought in her; and the image of the worn-out actress pursued her like a fury. Before facing the new realities which age imposed upon her, before renouncing her youth, so miraculously prolonged, before undergoing her metamorphosis into a new Sarah who in her turn would remain immutable for

years, she felt near to despair, and her disgust with life led her to defeatism. Death seemed to her preferable to indifference. But another unsuccessful attempt at suicide restored her confidence in her star—that is, in her energy. The tension of her being relaxed as if she had wakened from a nightmare, and she prepared to continue her life.

December 26th: Théodora. The audience was, if not hostile, at least inclined to be unfriendly. But, once more, the actress's will brought about a miracle. The spectators, completely subjugated, forgot to search her face for traces of fatigue; they just admired, simply and unanimously. The next day, Sarcey, who did not care for Sardou's work, attributed the success of the play to the genius of the interpreter. Jules Lemaître did not qualify his admiration with any restrictions; he was conquered by the talent of this actress "who is not one individual, but a complex of individuals." "She might enter a convent," he wrote, "discover the North Pole, inoculate herself with rabies, kill an emperor or marry a negro king without surprising me in the least."

Théodora signified a veritable resurrection for Sarah. As performance followed performance—for Théodora reached its 200th—her torments were gradually appeased. The resources of her energy were prodigious. Though on the brink of middle age, she strove with all the ardor of youth to discipline her acting and sever it more completely from her inner self. With success, she regained her old notions of her

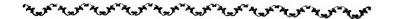
destiny as an artist. Henceforth, more than ever, art should be her refuge. To supplement her intellectual satisfactions she would indeed have wished, like other women, to attain some tranquillity in the sphere of sentiment. But since, evidently, that was not to be vouch-safed her, she would accept the fate allotted to her and live her multiple life, collective rather than individual, always monopolized by the successive heroines she was to embody.

At the beginning of the summer the posters of Théodora were withdrawn in Paris, and Sarah went to Belgium and England to give a few performances of the play there. The profits of Sardou's drama, together with Duquesnel's administration, had put the Porte Saint-Martin on its feet again. The future was comparatively clear; it was very necessary, however, to follow up the success with some play which would arouse equal interest. Victor Hugo had just died, and it seemed an opportune moment to stage one of his works. Ruy Blas, which Sarah would have liked to produce, was the exclusive property of the State theaters; so Sarah's choice devolved on Marion Delorme, which was announced for December 21st next (1885).

When the first night arrived, Sarah Bernhardt had hardly recovered from a period of serious ill health. During the rehearsals she had obstinately refused to give way before the weakness which attacked her; though she repeatedly fainted in the midst of her work, she would not abandon the struggle. Alas, all

her efforts produced but a meager result, for Victor Hugo's drama had very small success. Certainly, the failure must be imputed less to the interpretation than to the work itself. Romanticism was a thing of the past, and the death of the great man had restored it to actuality only for a brief moment. The program soon had to be changed, and Sarah Bernhardt discarded the rôle of the impassioned courtezan for that of the pure and melancholy Ophelia. For Sarah to take on the character of Ophelia may seem the kind of thing that is only done for a bet. Naturally her interpretation of it was extremely individual, somewhat unexpected. and certainly far from the intention of Shakespeare. However, she soon abandoned this part, so little suited to her, and again took up that of her favorite heroine. Fédora—her second self, whose passions sprang so easily from her own ardent and capricious nature.

Then, in May 1886, Sarah Bernhardt took ship at Liverpool for Rio de Janeiro. Her glorious journeys about the world had left her with a taste for long tours abroad. She desired to return to America, not, as before, as a quasi-fugitive, but in her full apotheosis. And the South, which she did not know, called to her.



~ XXIV ~

CLEAVING THE ATLANTIC OCEAN under an equatorial sky, the liner carrying Sarah Bernhardt made its way towards the New World. Leaning peacefully against the stanchions, the actress watched the heavy flight of the gulls, her whole being strung to a pitch of perfect harmony. She had left Paris with a light heart, having nothing to remember but her glory, and her latest successes, which had re-created her talent and rejuvenated her person. For once, during this crossing, she was conscious of a feeling of complete satisfaction, to which her tumultuous existence had been unaccustomed.

Two men were by her side; the two actors who were to share the principal rôles in the repertory of the tour: Angélo and Philippe Garnier.

Angélo was something of a ghost from the past, this being his first appearance with the actress since her abrupt departure from Italy; but the recollection of past tenderness now served to bind the two former lovers in a frendship that was almost brotherly. More than once in the life of Sarah Bernhardt a dead love had thus been transformed into a loyal, almost masculine affection.

It was the turn of Philippe Garnier to be the favorite. He was a beautiful and attractive young man, endowed with all the charm of novelty, and, as the company's juvenile lead, he was to be the actress's chief partner.

It is curious to note that all Sarah Bernhardt's liaisons in the theatrical world were with her partners on the stage. It may have been that the actress was trying, consciously or unconsciously, to establish a closer connection between her private life and the stage, in order to render the stage life more vivid. Or perhaps, on the contrary, it was this fictitious existence which exercised an irresistible power over reality. But, wherever the truth may lie, the celebrated actress never seems to have visualized very clearly any exact line of demarcation between her two existences, blending the two to an extent which makes it difficult to determine which was the prolongation of the other.

Looking out to sea from the deck of the liner, the actress considered the difficult task that awaited her in South America. The population, chiefly composed of the Spanish and Portuguese descendants of the stalwart Conquistadors, with the hot blood of the South in their veins, should by temperament be lovers of the flamboyant and passionate Italian drama, and might have been supposed insensitive to the more refined intelligence of the French theater. But an Italian company which had preceded Sarah Bernhardt on the same tour had obtained only a mediocre success; an omen which was not encouraging. Although fresh from the most brilliant successes in Paris, and the heroine of so many triumphant tours round the world, the actress was

pleased to be doubtful of her success; but uncertainty seemed to be the natural element of her troubled spirit, which was never willing to be lulled into a feeling of security.

When Rio de Janeiro appeared at last in the distance, the actress's apprehension, and also a feeling of pleasure not entirely free from dilettantism, became more acute. But this apprehension was inevitably banished by her magnificent reception, which she soon consolidated by the success of *Théodora*. The play, full of movement, and acted with vigor and enthusiasm, captured the Brazilian public from the very start; but the happy auspices under which the tour opened were shortly afterwards marred by an unfortunate incident.

Sarah reigned despotically over the members of her company, who bore, more or less docilely, with all her tirades and caprices; but she was too often carried away by the intoxication of her prestige. On this occasion there was a more than usually vehement discussion with one of the company, an actress as outspoken as Mme. Angot and known as "fat Martha" on account of her corpulence. This lady, having exhausted all verbal arguments, returned to the now celebrated actress the blow which the youthful Sarah had administered to Madame Nathalie twenty-five years earlier. In South America, where the smallest incident assumes the proportion of an insurrection, the fatal blow provoked a scuffle, and the police had finally to intervene. This scandal, at the beginning of the tour, incurred public disapproval, and word was passed round to boycott all performances, with the result that the end of the company's visit to the capital was considerably less brilliant than its inauguration.

But the next stage of the journey was São Paulo, a rival to Rio, where the inhabitants had erected a triumphal arch in honor of the star they had looked forward to so eagerly. When Sarah Bernhardt finally appeared, women covered her with flowers, men spread their cloaks under her feet, and students lay down on the steps she had to mount.

The reverse of the Anglo-Saxons, the Latins made a genuine cult of actors, who, in their eyes, were the ambassadors of civilization. Sarah Bernhardt had long been accustomed to an almost idolatrous admiration. and her pride was certainly flattered by the manifestations of enthusiasm she provoked; yet some of these tokens of adoration were too servile not to be embarrassing, and she protested in confusion. But a delirious crowd, enraptured by her charm, persisted in acclaiming her to such an extent that one of the clergy, alarmed by so much profane enthusiasm, accused her in all seriousness of sorcery. For a moment a recurrence -a South American edition - of the puritanical phobia which a few years back had been stirred up, at her passage, by the pastors of the United States seemed possible. But, on the contrary ---!

Like new Conquistadors the actors proceeded from one great city of the Argentine to another. Leaving Buenos Aires for Uruguay and Montevideo, arriving in Chile to visit Santiago and Valparaiso, they landed finally in Peru, having met everywhere the same frenzied welcome. There were Homeric struggles between the magnates of South American cities as to which of them should have the honor of placing his private carriage at the actress's disposal.

The endless journey continued, bringing with it its fatigue. The exhausted company found no time for repose, let alone for enjoying the beauties of the country. The torrid sun attacked the delicate fiber of the overcivilized Parisians, and, on the border of the marshes of Panama, Angélo and Garnier fell sick of yellow fever. When Sarah's maid, less robust than the two actors, died of the terrible sickness, the company fled in panic from the accursed spot, covering Cuba and Havana, whence they embarked again for Brazil, leaving shortly afterwards for the United States.

Six years had passed since Sarah Bernhardt's first tour across North America, six years in which civilization, both social and industrial, had made astonishing progress. The name of Sarah Bernhardt had no longer exactly the same attraction for the crowd as that of a circus. The audiences which followed the performances with religious zeal had become conscious of the subtleties of theatrical art, and formed a public which, if not overeducated, was at least anxious to learn and to understand. They went to each performance with a French copy of the play, interleaved with an English translation, and no sooner had an actor spoken than the whole audience turned hastily to the translation. The noise of hundreds of pages turning

automatically at the same time filled the hall with the perpetual rustling of paper. At first the actors were irritated beyond measure by the sound, but eventually it became as unnoticeable as the familiar ticking of a clock.

During the last few years the puritanical spirit had become less gross, for people's minds had been to some extent liberated from the primitive beliefs they had acquired from a narrow-minded clergy. No one would now have dreamed of accusing Sarah of having come with the sole intention of preaching free love and sowing the seeds of debauchery in Yankee homes. The public no longer regarded the actress as a demon, but as an artist. It is even said that after one of her performances an enthusiastic American exclaimed, "I would like to be a Frenchman, so that I could call your poets and Sarah Bernhardt my fellow citizens."

This wonderful reputation was to some extent a compensation for the strain imposed on the actress by this exhausting existence. There was also another compensation, less sublime perhaps, but which Sarah saw no reason to despise; and that was the profit on the tour, which reached the sum of 800,000 francs.

By July 1887 the company was back in Paris.

Sarah had needed all her energy, during her stay in America, to prevent herself giving way to an increasing feeling of physical lassitude, but the long seajourney had relaxed her nerves and the salt air had refreshed her lungs. When she disembarked, she was more beautiful than ever, supple of movement, fresh of complexion, and quiet in spirit. Even her voice, purified by the sea breezes, had recovered its ancient timbre.

As soon as the actress returned to the capital she bought for 215,000 francs a house in the Boulevard Péreire, where she was to live for the rest of her life. She had her initials, S. B., carved on the wood of the main entrance, like a noble placing his coat of arms on the threshold of his ancestral mansion. The interior was furnished sumptuously and with unusual luxury, filled with exotic furniture and works of art, and rare ornaments from all parts of the world. Everywhere one trod on valuable Oriental carpets or the skins of wild beasts - lion, buffalo and tiger. Here were statuettes from Japan, there ibises in Chinese porcelain; the result was a carefully planned but almost impenetrable thicket of tropical luxuriance. From this heterogeneous accumulation, left in careful disorder, arose heady perfumes from the flowers that abounded everywhere -azaleas, orchids, and heavy-scented chrysanthemums (the actress's favorite flower).

The only person who could pass agilely through the confusion, which made movement difficult even in the largest rooms, was the actress, always busy, always on the spot, always in a state of tumult. She had to defend herself against the perpetual attentions of tradesmen, dressmakers, relatives hoping for a letter of introduction, creditors and authors bearing manuscripts. Mme. Guérard gave what help she could, by controlling the staff, organizing the household and

getting rid of the too importunate, but even this assistance could only relieve Sarah of a small portion of her multiple obligations. Her activity was astonishing and she appeared everywhere, younger and more exuberant than ever, making the proud reply to someone who discreetly inquired her age: "Twenty-three, like my son!"

This beloved son never left his mother's side, and it was usual to see the tall young man following the actress on every occasion. He led a life similar to that of other children of the great, a shadowy existence by the side of his mother's overpowering personality; but his filial admiration was unbounded and unreserved, and he devoted himself exclusively to helping on her career. As careful of his lady's honor as a page of the Middle Ages, he refused to allow the faintest shadow to be cast on his mother's reputation, and seems to have been condemned by fate to a life of perpetual duelling. Even when, a few years later, he married a certain Princess Jablonovski, his life was still devoted to Sarah Bernhardt, whom, incidentally, he only survived by five years.

Sarah Bernhardt's first creation after her return from America was Sardou's La Tosca, a rôle which she soon established as one of her greatest successes. She gave an impassioned interpretation of the part of the Italian singer, substituting her own personality for that of the great lover who gambled with life and love under the burning Italian sky, where Sarah herself had known, at the beginning of her liaison with Damala, one of the most moving episodes of her life.

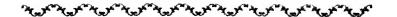
Both public and critics united to scale the heights of eulogy. But, in spite of the fact that the Press of the boulevards took advantage of the occasion to remark on the very close friendship beween actress and author. and garnished the remark with appropriate anecdotes. the reviewers' praise was entirely devoted to the interpretation. Sardou received, in general, crushing notices, he was granted the title of craftsman, but not that of artist. Some writers even accused him of plagiarism; and Sarcey, satisfying an ancient grudge, attacked the composition of the play, the production and the scenery. Sardou rounded on his attackers in fury: "Sarcey, who understands nothing about painting, music, architecture or sculpture, and whom nature has brutally deprived of any artistic feeling . . . it is not surprising that he should be not only indifferent, but positively hostile, to any reconstruction of the past by custom, dress or setting."

In spite of this revival of her theatrical fame, Sarah suddenly rediscovered a love of sculpture and painting. She transformed her billiard-room into a studio, where she spent her leisure hours, wielding brush or modelingtool alternately, as the mood seized her. She produced a not discreditable canvas, "La Jeune Fille et la Mort." From time to time her old preoccupation with mortality overcame her, and she expressed the same sentiments in a one-act play, L'Aveu, produced at the

Odéon, of which she was the author. L'Aveu is a drama—rather in the Grand Guignol manner—which, although it shows a perfect mastery of stage technique, does not bear serious investigation. However, thanks to the name of Sarah Bernhardt, this somewhat macabre fantasy obtained a fair success.

Sculpture, painting and literature were only unpretentious relaxations with which she liked to occupy her scanty leisure, without allowing these pastimes to interfere with her theatrical career. After 127 performances of *La Tosca* she again left Paris for a tour of Spain, Portugal and England.

She could not foresee that when she returned, exhausted and hoping for a few weeks of recreation and repose, fresh trouble was to be thrown into her life by a figure rising suddenly from the darkness of the past.



~ XXV ~

This phantom emerging abruptly from the darkness into which he was so soon to relapse once more, and forever, was a strange figure—not completely dead and yet hardly living. But, whatever his appearance, the actress was stirred to pity, for it was someone she had once deeply loved—her husband, Aristide Damala.

Whilst Sarah Bernhardt, carried from one triumph to another, had reached the heights of success, Damala had been covering, with equal rapidity, the path which leads precipitately from one degradation to another. His career as an actor, which had opened so brilliantly, had been undermined by a terrible failing. The evil made its first appearance shortly after Damala's return from Africa, when he was advised to try opium as a cure for his violent attacks of neuralgia. He acquired a liking for it. Then came the insidious temptation of morphia and cocaine. Having once adopted this course, Sarah's former husband was a condemned man. The ravages of the drug, at first unnoticeable, became lamentably clear, poisoning the blood stream, eating into the flesh and paralyzing his mental faculties at the age of thirty-two. By 1887 he was a pitiable caricature of the Don Juan whose charm, six years earlier,

had been sufficient to unsettle the emotional equilibrium of the much disillusioned actress.

Damala was now no longer capable of giving a respectable performance, and he was obliged to abandon the stage. With cadaverous features, deep pockets under his lusterless eyes, in an extremity of torpor, indifference and feebleness, the one-time diplomat endured the miserable existence of the outcast. He experienced all its humiliations: the poverty; the louis begged of former acquaintances, who passed hastily with averted glances; the pitying smiles and the contempt of those whom formerly he had himself despised; while all the time his longing for the fatal drug became more devastating and irresistible.

A rumor of this misery reached one day the ears of Sarah Bernhardt, in the midst of all the joyous frivolities that habitually surrounded her. Since the day of his flight to Africa the actress had banished even the name of Damala from her memory. Yet she could not resist some feeling of compassion, and she obtained the address of the modest lodging where Damala was housed. There, in an atmosphere saturated with indigence and vice, some form of reconciliation took place between them. Not that there was any question of love between the two. The human débris that presented itself under the name of Damala was no longer capable of arousing such a sentiment. But Sarah, filled with pity at the spectacle, respected the ashes of her dead passion and, incapable of abandoning the man she had

so deeply loved, had Damala removed to her house in the Boulevard Péreire.

She nursed the invalid indefatigably for two months. On behalf of this mortal already half way to the grave, the temperamental actress showed the patience of a nurse and the devotion of a mother. Thanks to her, Damala, still in the prime of life, but with the outward appearance of an old man, was dragged slowly back to life. His health improved to such an extent that his recovery seemed certain, and Sarah, due to set out on a fresh tour on October 1st, 1887, decided to include him in her usual retinue, which consisted of one son, several impresarios, a repertory company, personal servants, a complete pack of hounds and the tigress Minette.

The tour in question included Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Bucharest — where she acted before Queen Nathalie — Constantinople, Cairo, Alexandria, Tunis, Rome, Florence and Milan, and wound up with a visit to Scandinavia. She returned to Paris shortly after the opening of the Exposition Universelle and took advantage of the occasion to revive some of the customary successes of her varied repertoire, including La Tosca and La Dame aux Camélias.

In spite of her incomparable vitality, her energy and her precautions, the actress was inevitably worn out by the fatigue of these uninterrupted journeys. The taste of glory was too familiar to her to provide an adequate stimulant. She returned from her tour of Europe considerably depressed by various troubles. Chief of these was Damala's state of health. He had been considered cured, but he was again showing signs of exhaustion. Sarah nursed and watched over him with unchanging kindness, but she could not conceal, even from herself, the fact that his worn-out body could not hold out much longer. Nevertheless she fought on with a kind of stubborn fury to snatch the victim from the jaws of death. Partly to please the invalid, and partly to reassure herself, she promised Damala that he should have his old part of Armand in La Dame aux Camélias, which she was shortly to produce in London. This represented a considerable sacrifice on her part, for she was perfectly aware that it might endanger the success of the whole performance, and she had never dealt lightly with the things of her art.

Damala naturally had great difficulty in fulfilling the rôle. A few years earlier the part had been one of his greatest successes, but now his performance aroused nothing but pity, and the incident caused Sarah many heartburnings and bitter memories.

Shortly after the company's return to Paris, the state of Damala's health became seriously disquieting. Nobody who was with him could explain the cause of his relapse, which baffled even the doctors, and Sarah was inconsolable.

The invalid wasted slowly away. On August 18th, 1889, he was found dead in his bed. At the same time the mystery covering his tragic end was disclosed, for

a close examination of his room led to the discovery of forty-eight grams of cocaine and fifteen grams of morphia, which the dying man had carefuly concealed. Eluding the observation under which he was placed, Damala had continued to poison himself. Whilst his attendants were astonished at the progress of the disease, and strove to remedy it, he had, unknown to all, been successfully scheming to obtain possession of the two drugs which eventually killed him.

His death was a severe blow to Sarah. No doubt her tears were not so much caused by the loss of the human wreck she had tried to reconstruct, but by the fact that this corpse had embodied the most powerful illusion of her youth; it represented an epoch in her life that was gone for ever, and for that she wept. . . .

Sarah's great friend, Louise Abbéma, was instructed to make a portrait of the dead man, in order to preserve the memory of his features. So many souvenirs, both loved and hated, were attached to the miserable remains, that she would have liked to have kept these also with her. But Damala's family, hearing of his death, forgave their outcast son, and made a point of claiming the body for interment in Greece. Sarah protested desperately, but in vain.

She did not linger over this macabre dispute. Life, like a whirlpool, carried her forward to fulfil her destiny in other places. There was no time to waste in vain regrets for the past, when the present and future held so many attractions. Besides, Sarah Bernhardt was

not her own mistress. She belonged to her public. Exactly twelve days after the death of Damala she was playing Fédora at Dieppe, and shortly afterwards, in the same town, La Tosca.

She had had other partners since Damala, and other lovers, and many of her liaisons had been more happy. There seemed no reason why she should always remember this one in particular. Her chief recollections of the man were full of disillusionment. This one love was perhaps distinguished from the others by the bitterness which it held even in memory, and the memory was tenacious and lasting.

The mere chance that had brought Damala back for an instant into her life had been sufficient to revive as strongly as ever her unsatisfied past. Whatever she might do, the actress, with all her resilience, had difficulty in banishing his ghost. Her mind dwelt on the dead man, in spite of herself, and occasionally she signed her letters, Veuve Damala. Her first thought, when she visited Greece a little later, was to visit the tomb of her husband. But this pilgrimage seems to have been the last concession made to the memory of Damala.



SARAH BERNHARDT 1889



~ XXVI ~

The death of Damala Marked for Sarah Bernhardt the definite close of the epoch of violent storms and notorious scandals. The actress was now nearly fifty, an age at which childish escapades no longer meet with the same indulgence as in youth. Sarah Bernhardt was too intelligent not to realize the fact. Although the period of wild and exciting eccentricities was over, she had not slavishly modified her character. At the bottom of her heart was still the same passionate turbulence that had stirred the little schoolgirl at the convent of Grands-Champs to revolt. But, by force of habit, her temperament had adjusted itself to the fetters it had so violently shaken in earlier years, and it was only on rare occasions that she gave way to storms of rage.

If her impetuosity had been modified by age, adversity had also been a profitable teacher. During her glorious career she had met with many misfortunes. She had lost many loved ones, her early affections, and the faithful friendships she had formed at her début. From these losses she had acquired a certain serenity, not untinged with bitterness, and the lowering of her vitality through ill health had also become a moderating influence. During the last few years her constitution had been severely tried, and she often went on the

stage in such a state of weakness that doctors had to be concealed in the wings, ready to assist at any moment. She often trembled as if she were about to faint on the stage, and had to support herself on the nearest object. Her movements had become less adroit, and during one of her attacks of faintness she incurred a severe injury to her leg. The result was a dangerous inflammation, and for a time it seemed that an amputation would be necessary. In the end this extreme measure was avoided, but not necessarily for ever. It was the first warning.

Sarah was hard on herself, and obstinate in her determination to carry out her self-imposed task. The years that followed were one continuous chain of struggles, sometimes bitter and often disillusioning, against her difficulties and her undermined constitution. She braced herself to continue from evening to evening, from production to production, and when her health threatened to give way under the nervous strain, the only treatment she allowed herself was that of a change of air: that is to say, she went on tour.

The number of parts she created grew so great that it would be tedious to relate them, though there were one or two that deserve attention. Her interpretation of Jeanne d'Arc by Barbier, for instance, was something of a miracle, when one considers that she took the part of the Maid, a girl of eighteen. Her next rôle was the Virgin in the Passion of Edmond Haraucourt. This piece had to be performed in the Cirque d'Hiver, as the ecclesiastical authorities had protested against

the presentation of this sacred theme on the profane boards of a theater. (Incidentally, a few decades later La Passion was included in the repertory of the Comédie-Française.) In the immense amphitheater of the Cirque d'Hiver the actors' voices were completely stifled, and the effect was deplorable. To set off this failure, for which she was not responsible, Sarah gave an incomparable performance as Cleopatra in the play by Sardou. Here she was able to be herself, to be her age, and to show her own feelings, in the part of a mature and dangerous woman, terrified by the flight of time. Her performance was yet another triumph.

"This exquisite actress," wrote Albert Wolff, the critic. "is not only a great artist, but the great artist, the only one of our age who is worthy of the name, and who is without a rival in the world. I do not think it possible to have greater talent. . . . " Henry Bauer wrote: "She had the grace and majesty of a statue of an antique goddess, of that Cleopatra who seemed a radiant deity. She reconstructs the great enchantress, the lovely magician proclaiming the triumph of womanhood, alluring, coquettish, terrible and stirring. She has built up the character as only a supremely intelligent actress, who has seen and understood the antique world, could have created it. Her voice has never been fuller or more musical, her accent more penetrating. She seems, in the midst of this ill-constructed piece, a magnificent idol erect among the ruins."

In 1891 the actress undertook the longest tour in

her career, a tour of the world, which took her as far as Australia. During fifteen months' travel she gave 395 performances.

It did not occur to her, after she had established this record, to take a holiday. On the contrary, shortly after her return she set off again, again to earn fabulous sums which were only equaled by her prodigality. It is stated by those who knew her intimately at this period that the actress must have earned 6,516,000 francs during the last twenty-five years of her career. But at her death there were no traces of this fortune, dissipated and scattered to the four corners of the earth in ways which she herself would have found difficult to explain. Thus, driven by an irresistible force - perhaps the need of money, or the love of adventure and the unknown—the "Wandering Iewess" continued her travels, never allowing herself a respite, and nowhere finding a place of rest. "My country," she said, "is the breath of freedom, and my vocation, art without restraint."

She returned to Paris in September 1893, without showing any greater inclination for leisure. On the contrary, she bought the Théâtre de la Renaissance and plunged whole-heartedly into the work that it entailed.

The time-table of this so-called invalid of fifty was alarming.

She rose every morning at eight o'clock, to create a general agitation throughout the house. The howling of her menagerie, roused from its slumbers, filled the air with an indescribable cacophony; a bizarre orchestra to which both ears and nerves had to grow accustomed. After this there was the usual early morning procession of tradesmen, admirers, and authors crowding into the house. The most important visitor, however, was the postman, for Sarah Bernhardt's mail had become so voluminous that it required the attention of several secretaries, and she spent hours in dealing with their reports. In addition to all this, her other occupations had to be crowded into the forenoon, as her afternoon was devoted to the theater.

Sarah used to arrive punctually at the Renaissance at one o'clock, but not exclusively for the rehearsal of her parts. When she was in the mood, she was a wonderful producer. She controlled every department, running from the work-rooms to the machinery, from the stage to the auditorium. Her instructions were always short and imperative, and admitted of no argument.

The reporters were always on the watch in the hope of obtaining a sensational interview, but when they succeeded in speaking to her, Sarah was on the defensive, saying that she had no time for interviews, and preferred to be left alone. The reporter who succeeded in extracting a witty repartee considered himself lucky.

At six o'clock the rehearsal was interrupted. During the short interval which she allowed herself, Sarah used to partake of a frugal dinner, eating in haste, either in a corner of the office or "in the country," represented by an arrangement of property foliage, by which means she consoled herself for being severed from the beauties of nature. To make the illusion more complete, she would modify the scenery according to the season, dining in winter in an Egyptian scene with a background of pyramids, and in the summer in the middle of a stage forest, by the banks of a river. These meals in a pasteboard décor are typical of this period of her life, during which she identified herself more completely than ever with the stage. She existed in the midst of convention and fiction as if it were the broad daylight of reality.

The Renaissance reopened on November 6th, 1893, with the first performance of Les Rois, by Jules Lemaître. For the benefit of the public, a new regulation—that women should not wear hats in the orchestra stalls—was introduced at this performance. Sarah Bernhardt was always attentive to the comfort of her audience, and her initiative was soon imitated by the majority of the other theaters.

The chief actor at the Renaissance was now Lucien Guitry, who had just returned from St. Petersburg, where he had spent ten years. Guitry was a brilliant artist, with an alert intelligence and a direct and impassioned style. In him Sarah met an equal in talent and a worthy partner. They played together in many parts after Les Rois, and shared countless triumphs. After the production of Iseyl, by Armand Sylvestre, they revived together some of Sarah's old successes, Fédora, Phèdre, La Dame aux Camélias, etc.

Sarah Bernhardt continued to show a marvelous capacity for work. It was astonishing how this woman, who was alleged to be tubercular, and who had been abandoned by the doctors for the last twenty-five years, could endure fatigue. It was true that she had her own régime. When she felt exhausted, she would prescribe herself half an hour or so of sleep. Like Napoleon, she had the secret — or perhaps it was only another example of her tremendous will-power — of falling asleep at will. Thanks to these short intervals, she was able to carry out the day's work.

Her chief motive for this activity was to unburden herself of her surplus energy. She was almost indifferent to its results, for she had nothing more to obtain. She had become blasé with the profusion of successes and the heaped-up laurels. But when she recalled the difficulties of her début, the latent disquietude that was always with her came to life. She was assailed by doubts as to the utility of her perpetual activity. But her vanity brought consolation. There was nothing more she could require. She attracted men, and, what is more difficult, she charmed women. She was the leader of fashion, and her tastes were watched and imitated. She was idolized by every class of society.

Her success in society was now as brilliant as it was before the footlights. Her salon had become extremely fashionable, and her reputation for intelligence was wide-spread. Her conversation was witty, her humor caustic, and her repartees prompt. The quickness of her thought was shown by an uninterrupted flow of words, which became more or less vehement according to her attachment to the ideas she was discussing. She would soon show signs of impatience if her companion were slow in reply, for she insisted on others displaying the same qualities as herself.

The marked dilettantism of her taste had become more pronounced as she grew older. No longer enthusiastic at the international reputation she had acquired, she wished to be successful in private circles, and to make her audience as select as possible. She now instituted a series of "gala nights," which were only accessible to the rich and elegant.

These evenings gave rise to a fresh current of success, especially when there appeared on the horizon her "dramatic author," Edmond Rostand



~ XXVII ~

The star of Victorien Sardou was on the wane. He was now sixty-four years old, and in advanced literary circles he was considered "finished." Many were astonished that Sarah Bernhardt should still rely on this outmoded author, whose success was due to "the error of a past generation." Sarah's own talent was ever youthful, but Sardou had become a shade of the past, and it was felt that she should devote her talent to the living.

If Sardou lacked genius, he was at least an honest workman with an unrivaled feeling for his trade, and nobody attempted to deny his mastery of technique. Sarah was attached by a feeling of gratitude to the writer who for the past ten years had placed his pen at her service, who had built so many of his plays round her personality, and whose chief purpose in life seemed to be to glorify her talent. But she could not fail to perceive the groundwork of truth in the discreet observations she received on the subject. She was too perspicacious not to realize that Sardou's work belonged to a dramatic cycle that was now exhausted and out of date.

The actress was all the more convinced of the fact when she encountered a young man who personified the artistic aspirations of the epoch, and who offered to place his eager and youthful talent at her feet.

Their first meeting was in a railway station, as Sarah was about to set off on tour. A young man, detaching himself from the crowd, made a deep bow and offered her a manuscript, which she accepted mechanically. The work, entitled *La Princesse Lointaine*, and signed by Edmond Rostand, made the journey pass like enchantment.

Rostand, born in 1869, was Sarah's junior by twenty-four years. He was an excitable Marseillais, in love with literature and glory. He had already made his venture into poetry by publishing some volumes of verse which, although not particularly inspired or original, had attracted some attention. At the age of twenty-five his play Les Romanesques had been produced by the Comédie-Française and had been nearly a triumph.

The young poet and the actress were mutually attracted from their first interview. They soon discovered a uniformity of taste on many points that drew them together. For a long time their careers ran parallel, and it was only the great difference of age between them that interfered with the complete harmony of their relations.

It was, however, impossible to believe that Bernhardt was fifty. Her silhouette, her features, and her acting combined to belie her birth certificate. She could, naturally, no longer pass as a young girl, as a few years earlier, and in her moments of extreme

fatigue the first stigmas of old age were apparent. But the litheness of her figure, which saved her from the flabbiness of most women of her age, occasionally enabled her to produce a miracle of astonishing youthfulness. Her spirit had not grown old, and seemed only to have cast off its first youth to put on another—that of the coming generation, the generation that had sent her Rostand as its ambassador. With such an advantage in his favor it was not astonishing that the young author should take an important place in her life.

On April 5th, 1895, Sarah Bernhardt appeared before a delighted Parisian public in *La Princesse Lointaine*. The play was a variant on the Tristram legend, and the actress's diction gave a wonderful animation to the verses, and added to their charm and subtlety. In this part the actress attacked a type of rôle distinctly different from those to which she had been accustomed.

After this she left France for a series of extensive tours, covering England, all the States of Europe, and, a little later, America. There is no point in elaborating on the successes she obtained everywhere en route, for she was less concerned with these assured triumphs than with the satisfaction of having discovered an author who would enable her to renew her talent, and keep her in touch with the aspirations of the coming century.

During her stay in New York there occurred, however, an interesting incident. Sarah Bernhardt's arrival coincided with that of Duse and her company. The two actresses now regarded each other as rivals, with a certain defiance. Sarah Bernhardt, particularly, was offended by the presence of her youthful and talented competitor, for her pride could only be tolerant of satellites. The discreet and aristocratic talent of Duse had only stirred the American business men to lukewarm admiration, and her favorite rôle, La Femme de Claude, by the younger Dumas, had not aroused very vigorous applause. Sarah decided to challenge her rival to an artistic duel, and announced the performance of Dumas's play, in which she had appeared in Paris, but which was not included in the repertory of the tour. Her determination to eclipse a rival and her aggressive temperament accorded well with the character of the principal personage, and she obtained a sufficiently brilliant success to satisfy her vanity.

On her return to France, on December 6th, 1896, she was welcomed by the warm and encouraging friendship of Edmond Rostand. Sarah made no attempt to conceal her affection for the young author, who, for his part, bore witness to his attentive and cordial respect for the great actress.

A great day was approaching, which was to mark an important date in her life: the *Journée Sarah Bernbardt*. On this day the whole of Paris, from the literary and artistic world to the anonymous crowd, was to celebrate her dramatic talent. Her carriage had to pass over a veritable carpet of flowers as she made her way through the cheering and crowded ranks of her admirers to the Grand Hôtel, where a banquet for 600 guests had been made ready. Every well-known name, from Poincaré to Antoine de Rothschild, from Rostand to the Princess of Monaco, was represented, and countless telegrams arrived from all over the world, some from unknown people, others from celebrities such as d'Annunzio.

After the banquet, a procession of 200 coupés defiled along the boulevards on the way to the Renaissance, where Sarah was to give the second act of *Phèdre* and the fourth act of *Rome Vaincue*. "It was the art of Greece in all its purity, all its simplicity, all its nobility; Greek art as immortalized by Phidias," was the report of a critic. Going back many years for the choice of a subject, the actress had decided to celebrate her day of triumph by reviving her greatest successes at the Comédie-Française. It may conceivably have been with the intention of scoring a point off the "Maison de Molière," and such was the general interpretation of her choice. The officials retorted by pretending to ignore the artistic event which had been the sensation of Paris.

Before the performance started a critic, Henri Bauer, encountered a confirmed skeptic of his acquaintance behind the stage, and was assured that "Sarah Bernhardt would never succeed in pleasing everybody." At the end of the performance the same skeptic was observed to have red eyes and swollen eyelids. "It was very hot in the theater," remarked Henri Bauer, in a casual manner. "No," replied the other

simply, "I wept." And, indeed, there was little reason to be ashamed of the confession, for there were many in the enthusiastic audience who had no drier eyes than he.

The performance closed with the collective homage rendered by French poets to the wonderful interpreter of their work. One after the other Mendès, Coppée, Haraucourt, Theuriet, Rostand, passed across the stage. The actress's talent was acknowledged in many ways. The most successful of all was Edmond Rostand, with a sonnet he had composed in honor of the heroine of La Princesse Lointaine, and which, read for the first time in public, marked the triumphal climax of the evening.

Thenceforward the public became so accustomed to seeing Sarah Bernhardt and Edmond Rostand together on every occasion — in the street, at banquets and celebrations — that it soon became impossible to imagine one without the other. For a long time they were as inseparable in the minds of the public as they were in reality.

A new play by the young poet, La Samaritaine, was now announced at the Renaissance, based on the Biblical story, which Rostand exploited with moving sincerity. The future author of L'Aiglon gave an inspired interpretation of the episode. After laborious rehearsals, the play was produced for the first time on Good Friday (April 14th, 1897), and obtained a success which equaled that of La Princesse Lointaine. "The Passion," explained Edmond Rostand, "was then a

thing of the future, and the Christian epic was unshadowed by the tragedy and drama of the betrayal and Calvary. Christ's preaching was full of love and sweetness and poetic allegories, and I have concentrated in my poem the whole of this first period of the Gospel. I have tried to give the impression of the freshness, of the renewal by brotherly love and renunciation that the Messiah brought with Him."

La Samaritaine enjoyed only a very short run, as Sarah Bernhardt had to leave shortly afterwards on tour in order to fulfil a previous contract.

But, before her departure, Sarah, who no longer feared the competition of any rival, placed her theater at the disposal of celebrated foreign actors such as Irving, Ellen Terry, even Duse. "I want to see the most distinguished representatives of foreign dramatic art acting in my theater," she declared, "for the satisfaction of my public which I adore." Not content with this, on June 14th, 1897, she appeared in the fourth act of La Dame aux Camélias at the same soirée at which Duse appeared in the second act of La Femme de Claude. This soirée had been organized in honor of the younger Dumas, who had recently died, and the profits were to go towards the erection of a statue to the celebrated dramatic author. Coquelin and Yvette Guilbert also collaborated in the performance, which was unique in the annals of the French stage. The success obtained by Duse did not trouble Sarah Bernhardt. When she appeared herself, the audience trembled with an enthusiasm which was only surpassed when she advanced to the front of the stage to recite the poem which Rostand had composed for the occasion.

On her return she produced Les Mauvais Bergers, by Octave Mirbeau, a type of play which was for her unusual in both matter and manner. Mirbeau, christened "the Rodin of literature," was realist in the extreme, and greatly interested in social problems. This play allowed Sarah to reveal an unsuspected aspect of her talent. Up till now the parts she had played were those which represented sorrow or human passions, undefined by time or space. Mirbeau's play imposed a more delicate task, as in it she had to abandon the sphere of sentimental generalities and express the specific troubles of a particular class, and the injustices imposed by the social system. Sarah grasped these subtleties at once, and struck the right note without hesitation, finding, from the first moment. the poignant and simple manner which was demanded by the theme.

It was at this period that the actress, who had long been overstraining herself, felt a sudden attack of weakness. Disease had at last overcome her somewhat fictitious robustness, which she had maintained with the assistance of medicines and strength of will. For some time she was laid low, incapable of the least physical effort. Her fortitude was undermined by this incapacity. Eventually she resigned herself to accepting the operation that was advised, but the evening before the operation was to take place happened to be the 13th of February. Seized with superstitious fears

at the last moment, she refused to enter the hospital on such an ill-omened date. She spent the evening in Society, which she left at eleven o'clock in the evening with a smile on her lips. The following day, in her bed at the hospital, she was patient and heroic, and bore her pain without a murmur.

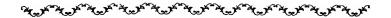
She recovered fairly promptly from the effects of the operation, but her general health was in no way improved. Illness had made a permanent home in her fragile and overtaxed body, and was slowly undermining her constitution. The actress affected to ignore her state of health. "Where other women would be still in bed, or lying weakly in armchairs," wrote Mirbeau, "she is coming and going, upstairs, downstairs, entertaining and working. At home, at the theater, she is always where she is needed. She rehearses by day and by night, directing everything, concerned with everything, superintending everything — the scenery, the dresses, the slightest details of lighting and production; she controls each gesture, each intonation, each expression, acting every part, one after the other or sometimes all together; she is always about to create something new or invent something beautiful. The whole existence of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt has been beyond the limits of possibility — a prodigy or a miracle."

Although she knew that for the moment she was cured, her imagination was always actively concerned with the prospect of a hopeless future. She tried to cure herself by activity and excitement, trying to

make a mock of the old age which was approaching, and which had already marked her irrevocably with a decrepitude more odious than death itself. In spite of the fact that she only exhausted herself the more, she forced herself to work, attempting to deceive either herself or the public. As usual, she spent most of the day at the Renaissance, but this theater no longer satisfied her. Her ambitions flew higher, and she dreamed of a larger and more modern stage, which should be the definite background of her triumphs, and which should recall the memory of her glory to future generations.

It so happened that the Théâtre de la Nation, in the Place du Châtelet, was to let. This vast establishment conformed in every way to the wishes of the actress, who immediately took on the lease.

It was the birth of the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt.



~ XXVIII ~

SARAH BERNHARDT, WHOSE was now established in perpetuity, had become as it were an official personage in the life of Paris. The time when she had to defend her reputation, the time of scandals, was over. The French public accepted the actress as she was, and had become accustomed to her vagaries. For her part, Sarah Bernhardt no longer indulged in any startling caprices. The whole force of her will, which at her début had helped her to triumph over every difficulty, was now occupied in defying the approach of age. She appeared, indeed, to be always young and beautiful, and to some she appeared as unchangeable as an unfeeling statue. But she was determined to convince the world even further, and to convince herself also, that she had miraculously escaped the universal clutches of old age. She was also concerned to show herself worthy of Rostand's affectionate friendship. From now on, therefore, Sarah selected exclusively youthful parts, surrounding herself at the same time with exclusively youthful friendships. She had seen around her a succession of actors, critics and authors, but she had remained, and still remained, equal to herself. She found, however, that the youthful seriousness of young men suited her somewhat artificial youth better than the light-hearted

spontaneity of girlhood, and she acted, for preference, in masculine parts. Whether she called herself Lorenzaccio, L'Aiglon, or Bohémos (the Athenian poethero of a play by Zamacoïs), she was always the same somewhat overthoughtful young man, who conceals his profound disquietude beneath a calm exterior. The only satisfactory employment her artistic feeling could find was in parts that gave the fullest scope for her talent and intelligence.

"I do not prefer masculine parts," she wrote, "but I do prefer masculine brains . . . Hamlet, L'Aiglon, Lorenzaccio; and I am certain that these parts will always gain by being acted by intelligent women. But, on the other hand, there are parts, such as Nero, Faust, Romeo, Napoleon and many others, that no woman could interpret. A woman's intelligence cannot replace a man's virility. How I wish I could have been a man. I feel that I should have had such a wonderful career!"

In the part of Lorenzaccio, Sarah Bernhardt attempted her first masculine rôle since the production of Coppée's Le Passant at the Odéon. But at that time her exceptional slimness had predestined her to the rôle of adolescent. In creating the part of Lorenzaccio, Sarah wished to demonstrate that the nature of her talent did not condemn her to the exclusive interpretation of the rôle of a woman victim of her passions, after the pattern that Sardou had cut to her figure. This play marked a departure in the type of part she was to act. The critics were enchanted by her render-

ing of the part, and acclaimed Sarah as "the soul of Florence." The adaptation of the play, by Armand Dartois, was greeted with reserve, for the adapter had judged fit to end the play after the murder of the tyrant by Lorenzaccio, thus suppressing de Musset's pathetic dénouement. Sarah retorted to these objections by invoking "the laws of the stage," and a short and bitter polemic ensued.

Sarah then attacked the most enigmatic of Shakespearian characters in an adaptation by Eugène Morand and Marcel Schwob, entitled La Tragique Histoire d'Hamlet, Prince de Danemark. This part seems to be the inevitable touchstone of all celebrated actors. At the close of the century it was the show piece of the English actor, Irving, and also of Sarah's expartner, Mounet-Sully. Sarah, who had eclipsed all her feminine rivals, was now to measure herself with men. Her creation of Hamlet departed considerably from tradition. Her interpretation was very fin de siècle, more passionate than undecided, more sentimental than philosophic; a Southern Hamlet moving through a play which had itself departed from the original, and had been adapted by "theatrical license" to approach more closely to the type of play then in fashion.

In London, which Sarah had considered the most fitting place to put her creation to the test, her interpretation roused violent comment. Sarah replied to those who criticized her in the name of tradition, and wrote to the *Daily Telegraph*: "The colossal genius of

Shakespeare belongs to the whole world, and every intelligence, whether French, German or Russian, has the right to admire and understand it." Her performance of *Hamlet* at Stratford-on-Avon for the Shakespeare festival was magically successful.

While Sarah Bernhardt was thus successfully defending her particular dramatic tenets in Great Britain, Maurice Bernhardt, who had replaced his mother as titular director of the theater, though actually remaining the faithful executant of her wishes, was engaged in superintending the transformation of the establishment. The reopening was fixed for December 16th, and the posters announced a series of performances of *Hamlet*. As a matter of fact, Sarah was already tired of the part, and was preparing a new production, which was to mark the summit of her artistic career, but also the beginning of her slow martyrdom. The play was by Edmond Rostand, entitled *L'Aiglon*.

The rehearsals of L'Aiglon lasted several months. Sarah devoted herself fully and exclusively to her part. She read up the period exhaustively, and embarked on historical research in order to perfect the smallest details of production and costume. She even went so far as to make a journey to Vienna for the sole purpose of visiting the Palace of Schönbrunn, where the action of the play takes place. She took sketches of various apartments in the palace, in order to make sure that the historical reproduction of the background should be absolutely authentic. She spent a small fortune in

acquiring ornaments that would reproduce the atmosphere of the old Austrian monarchy, and had all the costumes of the play manufactured in the country.

There is no need to recall the first night of L'Aiglon. Every ticket was sold on the first day the box-office opened. Letters containing imploring demands for tickets, from persons known and unknown, accumulated on Sarah's bureau. The Press of the whole world waited anxiously for news of the long-expected event from their Paris correspondents. "Unforgettable date in the history of French art," wrote one critic, "when we witnessed the triumph of collaboration between the greatest French actress and our greatest dramatic author." Another wrote: "Enchanted evening, of which the glorious honor is due entirely to the divine Sarah and the magician Rostand."

L'Aiglon obtained its success at a moment when the new literature seemed to have detached itself completely from Romanticism. The younger generation, inclined to Naturalism, saw life through the spectacles of Emile Zola. Its success brought forth a band of partisans who loudly announced the renaissance of the Romantic movement, and prophesied the immediate decline of Naturalism. It was a triumph without a future. This revival of the panache of Méridional and Gascon tradition was destined to be confined to some charming heroic comedies of Miguel Zamacoïs and the Cyrano of Rostand, without provoking any imitations.

It was less necessary for Sarah to recreate her per-

sonality to interpret L'Aiglon, than in passing from Fédora and Théodora to Lorenzaccio. Her superabundant personality had still sufficient elasticity to make the character live, and to stir the feeling of the public. Her infinite understanding of the audience had taught her with what cry and with what gesture she would obtain a given effect. Although the chief character is not very profound, the verse not entirely free from preciosity, and the pathos of the drama sometimes sounding a little false to experienced ears, the whole is not without strength; the character of the hero has vitality and the composition of the play is clever.

Following on this sensational first night, the true summit of her career, Sarah, who had realized the whole importance of her creation, recovered the happiness of adolescence. Above all, she was freed from a painful uncertainty, for up to the last moment she had not been able to overcome a feverish excitement that, taking her back many years into the past, had revived in all their intensity the ready emotions of the novice.

L'Aiglon endowed Sarah with a fresh youth on the stage, and it appears to have rendered her the same service in real life. The great tragedienne, now nearly sixty years old, still pursued with the same intensity her sentimental journey, bringing to each love-affair, for many years to come, the ardor of a woman of thirty. A few years before the Great War, at the house of Octave Mirbeau, the author of Les Affaires

sont les affaires asked her at what age she would be too old to love. She replied mockingly, "When I draw my last breath. I hope to live as I have always lived. The strength of my energy and vitality lies entirely in their subservience to my destiny as a woman."

But the men who appeared at the side of Sarah Bernhardt, however famous they might be, never held her favor for long. Her personality was too strong to be attached for any length of time to one man. It was perhaps this instability and perpetual dissatisfaction that was the source of those elements of suffering and disquietude that drove her, each time more eagerly, to take refuge in art.

One year succeeded another, fully occupied by her work, her rôles, her caprices and her journeys. She never created a part without impregnating it with her personality, but her reputation had attained a summit from which no further heights could be reached. But that did not matter. She was only happy when on the stage, and the theater was her true element. It was her opium to weep before the footlights for the futility of desire and her lost illusions.

Her love of long journeys had not been destroyed by her ceaseless activity. On the contrary she became more and more cosmopolitan. For a long time she had harbored a feeling of antipathy, if not hatred, for Germany and the Germans, but little by little this dislike had been modified. She became reconciled first of all with German art, and produced in Paris a play by Sudermann, entitled *Magda*. This obtained, incidentally, only a mediocre success. On May 6th, 1901, she returned from America on a German liner. This trip on the *Kaiser Wilhelm*, which gave her an opportunity of observing the Germans more closely, helped a great deal to overcome her prejudices.

By the time she decided to visit Germany, during the summer of 1902, this dislike had definitely disappeared. Notwithstanding, she was sharply attacked by the German Press, for her anti-German sentiments were well-known on the other side of the Rhine. Her first contact with the Berlin public at the Schauspielhaus was glacial. However, the charm of the actress's personality was sufficient to transform, in half an hour, a disaster into an uncontested victory. The sincerity of her art, her wonderful technique and her experience of foreign audiences always enabled her to overcome even the most stubborn resistance. Her success with the Germans became almost a paroxysm when she played *Phèdre* at the Opera in Berlin.

This tour of Germany gave Sarah a subject for thought. She realized suddenly that her influence with the crowd made it her duty to preach good-will between nations, and not to incite them to hatred and vengeance.

Twelve years later the wind had changed again, and the impulsive Sarah Bernhardt, at the whispering of the first rumors of the Great War, returned to the enthusiasms and hatreds of former days.



~ XXIX ~

ONE PART FOLLOWED ON ANOTHER. In Varennes, a play by Lavedan and Lenôtre, Sarah Bernhardt personified Queen Marie Antoinette. Again it was a success; yet another success! But each success was so similar to the last that it became tedious in its monotony. For a long time the reaction of the public had appeared stereotyped. Admiration for Sarah was now a commonplace. It was also partly snobbishness, for it had become good form to affect a slightly blasé but respectful indifference towards the great actress. Sarah realized this, and did not sink into a rut of uniformity. By a recrudescence of vitality she was able, from time to time, to recall successfully the attention of the public. She was perpetually widening the limits of perfection by seizing every opportunity of manifesting her capabilities.

Thus when Duse appeared in a series of performances of La Dame aux Camélias, and received a more than usually favorable reception by the public, Sarah hastened to revive the play herself. In the part of Marguerite, which she had played successfully so many times, the indefatigable Sarah, at the age of sixty, almost succeeded in eclipsing Duse, who was scarcely forty-six. Duse's interpretation of the romantic courtezan was doubtless more thoughtful, more intellec-

tual, more "decorative," than her own, but was not to be compared with the French actress's rendering for emotion and feeling. She herself had said, "One must be really in love, one must weep, one must suffer, one must die. . . ." For this reason a critic like Adolphe Brisson could write: "She has turned Marguerite's agony into the most beautiful poem of love and sorrow that could ever be imagined. . . ."

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"Eleonora Duse is more of an actress than an artist. She follows in the footsteps of other people. True, she does not imitate them, for she plants flowers where she found trees, but all her art has never enabled her to create a character which was identified with her name; she has never created a being or a vision that evokes a memory. She puts on other people's gloves, but she puts them on inside out, and this with an infinite grace, and an air of complete detachment. She is a great, a very great actress, but she is not an artist."

In these words Sarah Bernhardt passes judgment on her celebrated rival in her Mémoires which appeared in 1904. In this work she cuts short her account of her life at her first return from America in 1881. The two volumes were confined to the narration of exterior events, related, incidentally, in quite an entertaining manner. This work, which she offered to a public anxious for information about her private life, caused a certain disappointment. Some had hoped for a scandal on its publication, and certainly expected to find

intimate revelations, or at least disrespectful opinions about the various celebrated personages the author had known. The tone of the Mémoires proved to be singularly anodyne. The actress gives full rein to her vanity, and discourses complacently on her theatrical successes, but scarcely touches upon her private life. For instance, there is no mention of her father, and the fairly important fact of her son's birth is passed over in silence, so that Maurice Bernhardt appears at the age of several years, after the fashion of a Deus ex machina. In short, these memoirs told the public nothing that it did not already know, even if they did, at least, clear up some of the details.

However, even if Sarah was not concerned with psychology, and if her memoirs only provide an indirect guide to the motives of her actions, the information they contain is not without value. Although they are silent as to the mainsprings of her conduct they do at least provide us with some idea of her ambitions. All the same, it is not so much in them as in the letters she wrote from day to day, in her articles, in her "rectifications" dictated in anger, that we must seek the documentation of her private life.

In 1905, shortly after the publication of these Mémoires, Sarah undertook a fresh tour of the United States. On her return from the journey the French Government showed signs of wishing to recompense her for her propaganda in favor of French culture. The traveler and writer Claude Farrère had already written: "There is no one who has done more than she

has to defend and illustrate our national genius in foreign countries." It was suggested that she should be given the Legion of Honor, but it was to be offered to her officially, not as an actress, but as the director of a theater.

Sarah Bernhardt would not accept this compromise, and M. Aristide Briand, who was then Minister of Education, tried in vain to overcome her objections.

"I have not abandoned my project in the least," said the Minister, "and I just wanted to see you, to ask whether you would authorize me to claim the Cross for you, as a director. On those grounds I should obtain it. . . ."

"No, M. le Ministre, I will not be decorated on those grounds. Neither as a director, nor as a sculptor... I am an actress. If I am to be decorated, I should be decorated for being an actress, and not otherwise. I will not accept a decoration awarded me on any other grounds than the art to which I have devoted my life and energy. It is a great art, and I will not deny it in order to obtain a medal."

"Well, then, I will not give up hope. I will carry on with my first project of obtaining the Cross for you as a dramatic artist, and I have not abandoned all hope of success."

However, Sarah had to wait eight years for her nomination; but, at the end of 1906, M. Briand succeeded in procuring her election as professor at the Conservatoire. Her election was unanimous, with the exception of two votes. The rumor went that one of

these two votes was cast by Mounet-Sully. Although Mounet and Sarah were officially on the best of terms, their early friendship had lately given place to a certain animosity. This was an unusual event in the actress's life, as she had always maintained a bond of cordial friendship with her past lovers.

Sarah Bernhardt formed great projects for her work as professor at the Conservatoire. "First of all, I shall fight against what it has been agreed to call tradition. I shall do my best to utilize the character of my pupils, and I feel sure that I shall make some excellent actors." But her character was too impatient for a professor, and she was soon tired of the experiment, which expired without leaving a trace.

After having presented at her theater La Vierge d'Avila, by Catulle Mendès, and Les Bouffons, by Miguel Zamacoïs, Sarah produced a play of which she was the author, Adrienne Lecouvreur. Some thirty years earlier she had successfully played the part of Adrienne Lecouvreur in a play by Eugène Scribe and Ernest Legouvé. This old play had long ceased to be satisfactory. She herself remodeled the theme, which was the life of the celebrated seventeenth-century actress, and amplified it out of her personal experience, making the work at once a justification and a defense of the professional actress. Sarah identified herself with this actress of the past, as she had so often identified herself with Sardou's heroines, especially Théodora.

Adrienne Lecouvreur's tragic love for Maurice de Saxe forms the basis of the play, which is very clever, admirably adapted to the stage, full of interesting dialogue, but almost entirely without literary value.

Adrienne Lecouvreur is by way of being Sarah's romantic testament. In this play, according to a critic. she tried " to cry aloud her adoration of her art," and she chose a figure which symbolized the actress's profession with the greatest nobility and charm. In one speech Sarah, through the medium of Adrienne Lecouvreur, protests: "You want me to deny my profession? You want me to trample under foot, to burn and scatter to the four winds, all the divine emotions which are my life's breath? You want me to deny the art of which I am a priestess? But do you understand. father, the art which you are cursing? It is noble, comforting, uplifting. It preaches gently what you preach with violence. It can evoke any image. It glorifies God. it stirs up patriotism, it reaches every brain and every heart, it moves, it transports, it electrifies! It chastens, it scourges, it forgives! "But how much more eloquent and effective the argument would have been if it had not proceeded from an actress!

Adrienne Lecouvreur was only advertised for a few weeks in 1907. On the annual closing, which occurred at an opportune moment, the actress retired to Belle-Isle. She had bought the old castle that dominates the whole of the island, and had had it entirely reconstructed and redecorated. Since then she had spent her holidays there, in order to forget her preoccupations

in its care-free atmosphere. It made an ideal refuge, a favorite spot where she could surround herself with familiar spirits, such as Clairin, Geoffroy, Louise Abbéma, and others, who led a happy life in this retreat closed to the importunate. The meals were plentiful and well-chosen, and the guests walked, talked, and jested interminably. There were intervals of repose, interrupted for tennis or croquet. Each one lived according to his humor, and to the satisfaction of every whim. One day Sarah announced laughingly on the tennis court: "I have just added up the combined ages of Geoffroy, Clairin, and myself, and it comes to 200 years. Invalid tennis . . . !"

The actress was extremely fond of the castle garden, which, as a joke, she had christened the "Sarahtorium." She found that the time she spent in it acted as an effective course of rejuvenation.

Not that she had as yet yielded to old age. She made a specialty of "discovering" young talent and giving it a start. She was always surrounded by young authors and actors at the beginning of their careers. To these she was always accessible, sympathizing with them, and willingly helping them with her advice and influence. The aged actress's theater was, above all, the circle of the younger generation.

Occasionally a deeper interest attached Sarah to one of her recruits. Thus Lou Tellegen, a young actor of Swedish origin, a former *pensionnaire* of the Odéon, and one of the most promising members of the French pre-war stage, became one day her favorite. Lou Telle-

gen was a magnificent young man and, in addition, an excellent actor. His friendship with the actress became so close that their marriage was openly discussed, but the rumor had no foundation. However, after a fresh tour of the Unted States, Sarah gave Tellegen the lead in her production of *Lucrèce Borgia* at the Porte Saint-Martin. This new part, which gave her a magnificent opportunity for giving expression to all the shades of maternal affection which she had profoundly experienced in real life, marked a new evolution in her art.

There now arrived a cycle of years which were entirely occupied by Sarah Bernhardt's tremendous struggle against ill health. Her left knee caused her intolerable suffering. The doctors' diagnoses were uncertain, and the medical authorities were unable to find a remedy for the kidney trouble that was perpetually torturing her. However, although she undertook no fresh creations, as director she watched jealously over the fortunes of her theater. At the beginning of the twentieth century production was not recognized as the sacred art that it is to-day, but Sarah had such an expert knowledge of the stage, and such a wonderful feeling for setting and perspective, that she realized some astonishingly successful effects.

The years passed, bringing her magnificent fêtes and royal acclamations, but it seemed that henceforward nothing could be added to her glory.



~ XXX ~

On June 28th, 1914, the sharp crack of a revolver set all Europe in sudden turmoil. The Serajevo murders unchained, in a mighty flood, all the hatred, the rancor and the covetousness that had been accumulating for years. At this signal all the evil passions of humanity were let loose in a brutal torrent over the Old World.

Sarah Bernhardt, at Belle-Isle-en-Mer, was the prev of personal anguish. Twenty years back, when still a young woman, she had been compelled by necessity to adopt an attitude and a mask, both on the stage and in private life. She had passed through a painful crisis that had even driven her to thoughts of suicide. Now, on the threshold of long-postponed old age, she had to enter another tragic phase through which again her will was to carry her victorious. But, at the moment, she was overcome by the most painful suffering, for her leg, which since a stage accident had been a periodic source of trouble, was now in plaster. She was seventy years old, and her energy and confidence threatened to desert her. She feared that she would never again be able to appear in public. Her enforced leisure was favorable to meditation, and to the consideration of life and humanity. She could now envisage clearly all that had been superfluous in her past, all the disappointments in a life overfull of illusions. What was left to her beyond her rebellious instincts? Although she was now an old woman, with a face furrowed with wrinkles, her ambitions were young as ever. In spite of half a century of struggle and success, the green laurels of her triumph seemed to hide only the faded garlands of unrealized desires and the crystal of tears that had never been shed. Her only solace was the hope that she would be able to work once more; for the pleasure of work, if fugitive, is at least real. . . .

Such was Sarah Bernhardt's state of mind when her manservant brought her the tragic news. Overcome, she burst into a flood of tears. "To live through two wars," she cried, "is too much." One war, at the opening of her career, had barred her first steps on the path of fame. Another war, at the close of her life, threatened to destroy the little hope that remained to her.

The following day she returned to the capital with her household. Paris was then in the fever of the first days of the war; days of mobilization, of proclamations posted up under the sign of two small crossed flags, of the first eagerly awaited communiqués, of naïve hope, of soldiers marching past on their way to the frontier. Forty years back, in a Paris that had been more feverish still, Sarah had been able to take her part by looking after the wounded. In August 1914 she was in despair, for her illness allowed her no liberty of movement, and the plaster hindered every gesture.

On August 31st she left the capital to take refuge in the little village of Andernos, near Bordeaux. Here, for a short period, she led a life of peace. Sitting at her desk, she prepared a series of articles for a well-known daily, for she was indefatigably active, in her attempt to occupy her mind and forget her sufferings. She appeared to be indifferent to everything, pretending to exist only with her memories, but this appearance of submissive calm was only a mask for the impatience that was always near the surface. She had really no great opinion of her writings, and deplored her enforced inactivity.

She fell into a habit of weeping during her passing moments of weakness, and, whilst waiting for one of Maurice Bernhardt's frequent visits, her only consolation was the presence of her beloved granddaughter, Lysiane. She was finally reduced to complete despair by a fresh bout of illness. Exhausted by fatigue, she underwent a tremendous internal struggle. One day she declared to her son, after the departure of the surgeon, Pozzi:

"I have suffered too much and too long. I am incurable. Maurice, you shall choose for me one of the only two alternatives: either I shall kill myself, or I shall have my leg amputated. Mon Dieu, I shall not be the first. . . ."

On February 11th, 1915, Sarah Bernhardt went by car to Bordeaux, accompanied by her old friend, Clairin.

On February 22nd the delicate operation was performed by the surgeon Dermée.

The actress's courage and tenacity were as usual

triumphant. The successful operation marked the temporary end of her sufferings, and shortly afterwards she left the clinic, feeling that she was completely cured.

Cured! She had soon forgotten her sufferings, and, though a cripple, was eager to serve her country. The situation was serious, and desperate battles were being fought around Verdun. Everywhere there was fighting and blood and death, but Sarah gave thanks to heaven that she had been born a Frenchwoman. In the month of August she was in Paris, trying to walk with an artificial leg and the help of crutches. On the 26th she reopened her theater with a play by Auguste Villeroy, La Vierge de Lutèce.

In spite of her love of activity, she was obliged to leave the task of supervising the rehearsals to her son, but a few minutes before the curtain rose she appeared in her box. The audience, who had not yet seen the new Sarah Bernhardt since the amputation, greeted her with frantic applause. The actress, overcome with emotion, realized that her popularity remained the same.

On November 6th, 1915, she reappeared on the stage after an interval of two years, taking a part in *La Cathédrale* that allowed her to remain immobile, as the author had taken her infirmity into consideration.

"Sarah Bernhardt's wonderful voice, so long silent," wrote a critic after a triumphant first night, "has once more spoken to the people of Paris, moved and enraptured at its sound. She has never been more

powerful or more sensitive. The glorious artist has never touched our hearts more profoundly."

In the excitement of this resurrection, Sarah Bernhardt set about composing the program of her theater for the next two years. She wanted to prove to the world that the eighth decade of her life had entailed no diminution of her vitality. Indeed, if she had wished for leisure, the ever-pressing need of money allowed her no respite. She rehearsed her parts, selecting for her repertory plays that were suitable to her state, and in January 1916 left Paris for London. Scarcely had she been delivered from the pains in her leg by a terrible sacrifice, than she was attacked by the old kidney trouble, but she did not interrupt her tour of Great Britain, where she produced patriotic plays specially written for the occasion. Her greatest success was in the part of a young soldier, an actor in civil life, who lies dying on a stretcher on the field of action. She could still give a marvelous reproduction of youth, as she recited patriotic couplets between her spasms of agony. She only left the footlights in order to give lectures, to encourage the crowd to endurance; and to speak of the enemy with unquenchable hatred. She lectured at Edinburgh: "The women of France have been wonderful in their devotion, their courage and abnegation. Mothers, wives, nurses, artists, are giving their lives to the great cause. The triumphant victory of the Allies will be the fitting recompense of Russian, English, French, Italian, Belgian and Serbian women. All have suffered through the wounds of their children

and husbands. All have seen with horror barbarian feet trampling on their beloved soil. But the hour will come to bring the enemy's chastisement and our deliverance. Keep up your hearts. Long live the Allies! Long live France!"

On her return to London she gave a performance of a short play, entitled *Une d'Elles*. In this she was a mater dolorosa, personifying the mothers of the combatants in the Great War. The author of the play was her granddaughter Lysiane, who, with her doctor, her impresario and her manservant, made one of her faithful suite, and who was the cherished companion of her last years.

The actress met the same enthusiastic reception everywhere. A dense crowd watched for and applauded her arrival at the station, in the street, and in front of the hotels at which she stopped, for her wonderful endurance appeared to all to be the marvel of the century.

She had scarcely returned to Paris before she signed a contract for a tour of the United States, but she did not wish to leave France without having paid a visit to the front. On May 9th she gave a performance, with some other actors, to soldiers who had returned from the front line. She continued her trip, being received by generals, carried on stretchers by privates, and everywhere surrounded by enthusiastic soldiers. For them she gave performances twice a day, and encouraged them by reciting verses from La Cathédrale. "I have acted before kings, I have been applauded by

the public of every country, I have known the most wonderful evenings, but I have forgotten them all. The greatest moment of my life was behind the lines." She visited the hospitals to console the wounded, to whom, with lowered voice and a flushed face, she recited the Marseillaise. Everywhere she was a torch of enthusiasm.

"My ambition," she said, "is to go as close to the trenches as possible. I am not afraid of the shells. What can they do to me? They can only put a glorious end to my career. But that would be too wonderful, and I dare not dream of it. . . . I went to within 500 meters of the Boches with General L., who understood my wish. The Boches, who had been firing all day, did not let loose a single bullet. Anyway, they would have missed me: my hour has not yet come. I am returning to the front, to bring our heroes something of our ideal. My health is good, and I am full of courage and energy."

But, in spite of this courage, age and ill health overcame her, and she decided that before embarking for the New World she would go to the seaside for a short period of rest and treatment. A tragi-comic incident was the prelude to her tour. When she returned to Paris in September she learned, to her stupefaction, that she had been refused a passport, on the grounds that, as Damala's widow, she was still a Greek citizen. The difficulty was eventually surmounted, thanks to the friendly intervention of Raymond Poincaré, and on the 30th of the month she embarked on the Espagne

at Liverpool. This time she was unaccompanied by her son or granddaughter, and her only companions were her manservant, her secretary and her doctor.

It was a dangerous undertaking to cross the Atlantic at this period of the war. In order to avoid enemy submarines and torpedoes the *Espagne* made her way silently by night, with all lights dimmed. Sarah was all the more stimulated by this phantom voyage. "My star is in the ascendent," she cried, "and, so long as it is in the heavens, I have nothing to fear. I feel young and am glad to be alive, for my spirit is still youthful and will never die."

She soon left the United States for Canada. At Montreal she gave acts from La Dame aux Camélias, Jeanne d'Arc, The Merchant of Venice and various patriotic plays.

Sarah Bernhardt gained considerable sums during this tour of North America, but, though she appreciated the money that enabled her to satisfy her prodigality, this tour is to be regarded less as a commercial enterprise than as propaganda for France. The Press greeted Sarah as French Ambassador, and she felt a divine faith in her mission. She acted, it is true, but for the most part in plays written for the occasion. She also gave lectures and wrote patriotic articles for the New York Times, even on occasion making public speeches. Volunteers are said to have enrolled after hearing her speak.

"We are going under, and the liberty of the world

will perish with us," she cried in an appeal to the American public.

Before the end of 1916, Sarah, to the despair of her impresario, had to interrupt her tour. Once again she was laid low by disease, and her health grew worse from day to day. At the age of seventy-three, far from her country and her relatives, she had to enter a New York hospital and undergo a fresh operation. Alarming rumors as to her state of health spread over France and the United States, but once again her magnificent constitution and will triumphed over disease.

By May she had recovered sufficiently to continue her mission. The tenor of her speeches differed now from the *Mémoires* published after her stay in Germany—"Oh, the injustice and the infamy of war!" Now she exclaimed, "I am hanging on to life, as I do not want to die till I have seen the defeat of the Kaiser."

At the end of August 1917 she set off again on tour. For fourteen months she traveled from town to town, from State to State, appearing on the stage, giving lectures, waiting for news from the front, fulfilling to the uttermost that which she conceived to be her duty.



~ XXXI ~

By the time the liner that brought Sarah Bernhardt back to France had cast anchor at Bordeaux in November 1918, the Armistice was already signed. The activity of peace-time was already getting under way, and hopes and projects were being formed. The past was in ruins, but there were hopes of a better future. Everyone was overwrought by the brusque transition from war to peace, and long-repressed activities were seeking their outlet. It was the dawn of a fresh world, in all the chaos of the birth-throes that had scarcely begun.

Survivor of a dead epoch, witness and star of many historic episodes of the past, the always youthful interpreter of Le Passant, of the heroines of Sardou, of L'Aiglon, Sarah Bernhardt was ready for fresh interpretations and a new era. The war was over. She allowed herself a temporary rest—that is to say, for several months she did not appear on the stage, but actually her activity suffered no interruptions. She gave lectures. She made a pilgrimage through the devastated regions of Belgium and Alsace-Lorraine. She undertook the writing of a short novel, a slight and attractive work that, thanks to the name of its author, appeared as a serial in a big daily, and then in book

form. But, above all, she was elaborating projects, projects of which she never wearied.

Thus she decided to return to America, and she got ready to reappear on the stage, where she intended in future to make use of the new generation of playwrights. She intended chiefly to interpret the works of three young dramatic authors of her circle: Maurice Rostand, the son of her old friend Edmond Rostand, who had died at the age of fifty, a month after Sarah's return to France; Lucien Guitry's son, Sacha; and Colin du Bocage, better known under the name of Louis Verneuil.

For the first time in six years, she spent the summer at Belle-Isle. Old age was a burden to her, in spite of her will-power and her always alert imagination. Again she suffered from kidney trouble, but that did not prevent her from realizing one of her projects by creating a part in the play *Daniel*, by Louis Verneuil, in the following September (1920).

"I will not make myself ridiculous by expatiating on Mme. Sarah Bernhardt's interpretation of the rôle of Daniel," wrote a critic after the first night. "For half a century, everything has been said about her that could be said. And then, one does not analyze genius; one prostrates oneself. . . ."

There is only one example of an apotheosis in the history of the last two centuries in France that can be compared with that which enveloped Sarah Bernhardt's last years, and that is Victor Hugo's. "One does not analyze genius; one prostrates oneself. . . ." No

more painful struggles to undergo. All the past, with its injustices, its scandal, its contempt, its revolts, its subterranean hostility, had ended in this respectful admiration. True, it was less the actress that aroused the enthusiastic emotion of the crowd than the host of memories attaching to her frail body. But to arrive at this point it had needed this tireless courage, this willpower that nothing could dismay, this eagerness always stimulated by despair, this tenacious and inspired search after an impossible absolute, this refusal of repose, this insatiability akin to that of the Roman empress, all these hopes and projects scattered over so many years, and this still ambitious serenity, still eager for the present and the future. It had not all been in vain! Her courage, like Theodora's, had been able "to triumph over every difficulty and to keep adversity at bay, even unto death."

The actress was covered with honors, even with those official honors that she had perhaps underestimated at her début. She was already Chevalier of the Legion of Honour when, on February 3rd, 1921, she was made Officer of the Order. The marriage of her granddaughter to Louis Verneuil, on March 9th, brought her a new source of joy, which she appreciated the more as, owing perhaps to her character or the fault of circumstance, she had had little experience, in all the happiness she had obtained in the course of a long life, of that which comes from the loving affection of a husband, mother or children.

But all the satisfactions that can soften the end of

a career could not lull the eternal wanderer to repose. She had been seen in every spot where it was possible to go, but she set off once more on the old routes. She played Daniel in London, which she visited for the last time. The whole of the diplomatic world was present at an official dinner in her honor, and she received its homage seated by the side of Lloyd George. When she returned to France in May she was extremely tired. She only left the cushions of her automobile for those of a sort of palanquin that she now found necessary for the least movement. In public she was always smiling, but her smile was bitter. However, as soon as she felt better, she set off for Spain. After a further performance of Daniel at Madrid she was decorated by the King with the Order of Alphonso XII. People knelt to her as to a divinity. She watched the bull-fights at Barcelona, and her enthusiasm was as much aroused by the spectacle as it had been fifty years earlier. "What a performance," she exclaimed; "what a heroic gesture!"

She was still the same Sarah, passionate, authoritative and headstrong. The experiences of an agitated life had taught her the value of masculine discipline, but the control that she exercised over herself was purely formal. In spite of old age, the illustrious actress was not yet at peace. . . . From time to time she was still tormented by the desire of immortality that had obsessed her in the past. She told herself that she would leave this earth without having created any lasting work. Nothing would survive her except her name and

a troubled image in the memory of many. Thousands had admired and applauded her in all parts of the world, but they also would disappear. Her reputation would then pass into the category of those that can no longer be tested. Perhaps it was better thus. Only a name: Sarah Bernhardt. But what had she not attempted? She passed in review all her experiments, all her violons d'Ingres. Poor sculpture! Poor painting! Poor literary efforts!

It was still the same will-power that urged her forward along life's pathway. She never allowed herself to stop. She had scarcely returned from Spain when she started on a new book, L'Art de dire (advice to young actors), which was expected to be the most interesting handbook of its type, but she did not finish it.

She created a rôle in a new play by Louis Verneuil, Régine Armand, and in La Gloire, by Maurice Rostand, in which she personified the allegorical figure of Glory. In the course of the year, 1922, she covered the provinces in six weeks, giving forty-eight performances in thirty-two towns. That was not all: she proposed to put into effect her long-projected tour of America, and to produce a new play by Sacha Guitry, with Lucien Guitry as partner.

On September 10th she returned to Paris from Belle-Isle-en-Mer.

On September 24th she gave a further performance of *La Gloire*, and left a few days afterwards for Italy, including Verneuil's two plays, *Daniel* and *Régine Armand*, in her repertory.

She interrupted her tour at Turin on November 29th. Her health was failing, but she did not stop to rest. She had scarcely recovered before she presented Athalie to the Parisian public. She did not know that her prodigious career was drawing to a close, and she refused to believe that destiny had chosen Athalie to be her last rôle on the stage. Sarah Bernhardt had not accepted the idea of death. She was extremely superstitious, and, without admitting it, expected a miracle. Throughout her life she had given way as much to her presentiments as to her impulses.

In spite of the kidney trouble that became increasingly painful every day, Sarah began to rehearse *Un Sujet de roman*, by Sacha Guitry, and signed, at the same time, a contract with a firm of cinematograph producers. But on December 29th, 1922, she fainted during a rehearsal of *Un Sujet de roman* at the Théâtre Edouard VII. She understood, and seemed to have resigned herself. . . .

"I am still alive," she wrote, "but I have often been very close to death in my death scenes on the stage. Sometimes it has taken me more than an hour to return to life after a performance. My heart has practically stopped beating and my lungs breathing. . . ."

Her friends were seriously concerned by her state of health, but less than a week after this alarm she recovered a certain amount of strength and so considered herself well enough to attend the dress-rehearsal of a new play by Maurice Rostand. However, she quickly had a relapse, and this time she had to be forbidden to leave her house in the Boulevard Péreire. She remained in bed for several weeks. But in February she had once more recovered a little vigor, and proposed to fulfil her film engagements. Since she could no longer reach the stage, the stage should come to her. Her studio was adapted to cinema purposes. The set was simple, representing a garret in Montmartre. Thus, by a tragic effort of will, Sarah Bernhardt offered her last incarnation to the eyes of the camera. In the part of a fortune-teller, she contemplated her latest partner, Jacqueline, a female chimpanzee, whose sole attribute consisted in the nonchalant opening of windows at her mistress's command.

She found her work more and more difficult to perform, but she did not despair. She persisted in believing that her indisposition was only temporary, and that she would soon be able to devote herself to her work again. On March 22nd she could still say: "I am so happy to be working!"

On March 23rd, when dining with her old and good friend, Louise Abbéma, she felt overcome by fatigue and went to bed. Professor Labbé, with two colleagues, was quickly summoned to her house, but, their consultation over, the three doctors could pronounce no diagnosis. By the morning, Sarah's weakness had increased, and she told those around her that she was "sorry to have to interrupt her work for a short while."

Her state grew rapidly worse, and at six o'clock in the evening the bulletin announcing her state of health was signed by five eminent practitioners. The whole of Paris had been warned, and waited with emotion for the end of la grande Sarah. On the following day she was very ill, and, after an exhausting day, entered on her agony. The countless parts she had played passed in delirium through her mind. She recited verses from Phèdre and L'Aiglon. Occasionally she had brief moments of lucidity. "How slow I am in dying," she said to the doctor on duty by her bedside, and added: "I know I have been delirious, because there is a hole in my memory." She no longer took any nourishment, and it seemed difficult to preserve the slightest hope.

On March 25th she seemed to get a little better. The delirium had ceased, and she was calm because she was exhausted. All her nervous energy was gone with the delirium. She inquired whether her coffin was in good order. Her coffin, too, was very old. Then she expressed the wish for a profusion of flowers at her funeral. She had always loved flowers.

For a long time no visitor had been allowed to enter her room, and she was watched over by her son and her two grandchildren, who were sometimes joined by a few intimate family friends. Her dogs, who usually crowded into the room, now wandered aimlessly about the house. The laborers who were working in the studio called out to the chimpanzee: "Shut the window, Jacqueline."

Public opinion, that inseparable companion of Sarah Bernhardt's destiny, was profoundly stirred. The editorial offices of the daily Press were busy with the compilation of obituary notices, and the archives were ransacked for illustrations showing the actress. Those who had known her assembled their recollections, which they would now be able to utilize. Those who had seen her, and they were countless, thought of her sometimes at this fateful moment. With passionate interest they followed her duel with death, the last struggle of her will, a prolonged struggle, and they waited feverishly for the issue of the combat. The reporters were on the watch at the doors of her house, afraid that death might come and catch them unawares. They looked as though they were waiting for their prey.

On the evening of March 25th her state grew worse, and on the morning of the following day she lost consciousness. Her features faded from minute to minute. They seemed already tainted by a kind of internal decomposition. The will that had so long sustained her body had let slip the reins, and the body, delivered to itself, had "let itself go." The sole indication of life was the beating of the arteries. All that had been the grandeur of her body was gone. No more fire in her eyes. The voice that had stirred the crowd was silenced. . . .

At about three o'clock in the afternoon the *curé* of the Church of Saint François de Sales administered the Extreme Unction to the Dying.

Shortly before eight o'clock the doctors gathered together for a general consultation: Sarah's condition,

and the particular condition of the affected organ could only lead to a fatal and immediate issue.

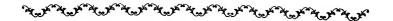
At nine minutes past eight in the evening the door of the actress's room opened to a weeping woman. The journalists assembled in the waiting-room dashed forward as the woman fled stammering, in a voice choked with sobs:

"Madame is dead."

Three days later a million men accompanied this figure of a past epoch on her last journey. It was a fragment of the heart of Paris that was to be hidden under a gray stone in the city of Père Lachaise. The supreme homage was rendered in silence, and not a sound was raised to eulogize the departed and her "golden voice," until a young actress, as if inspired, cried out to the heavens as a last farewell and a last consolation:

"Immortals do not die!"

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